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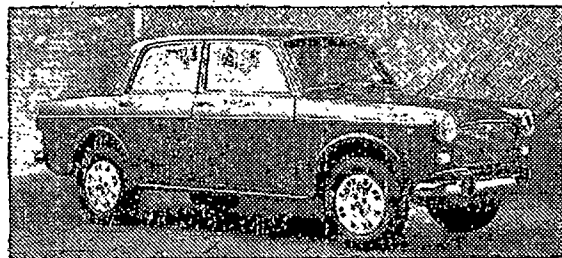
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KP-764  
(19.4.2001)

\* Source: Indian Auto Journal

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DIESEL  
Deluxe**

RHIZIC/PAL/309/97





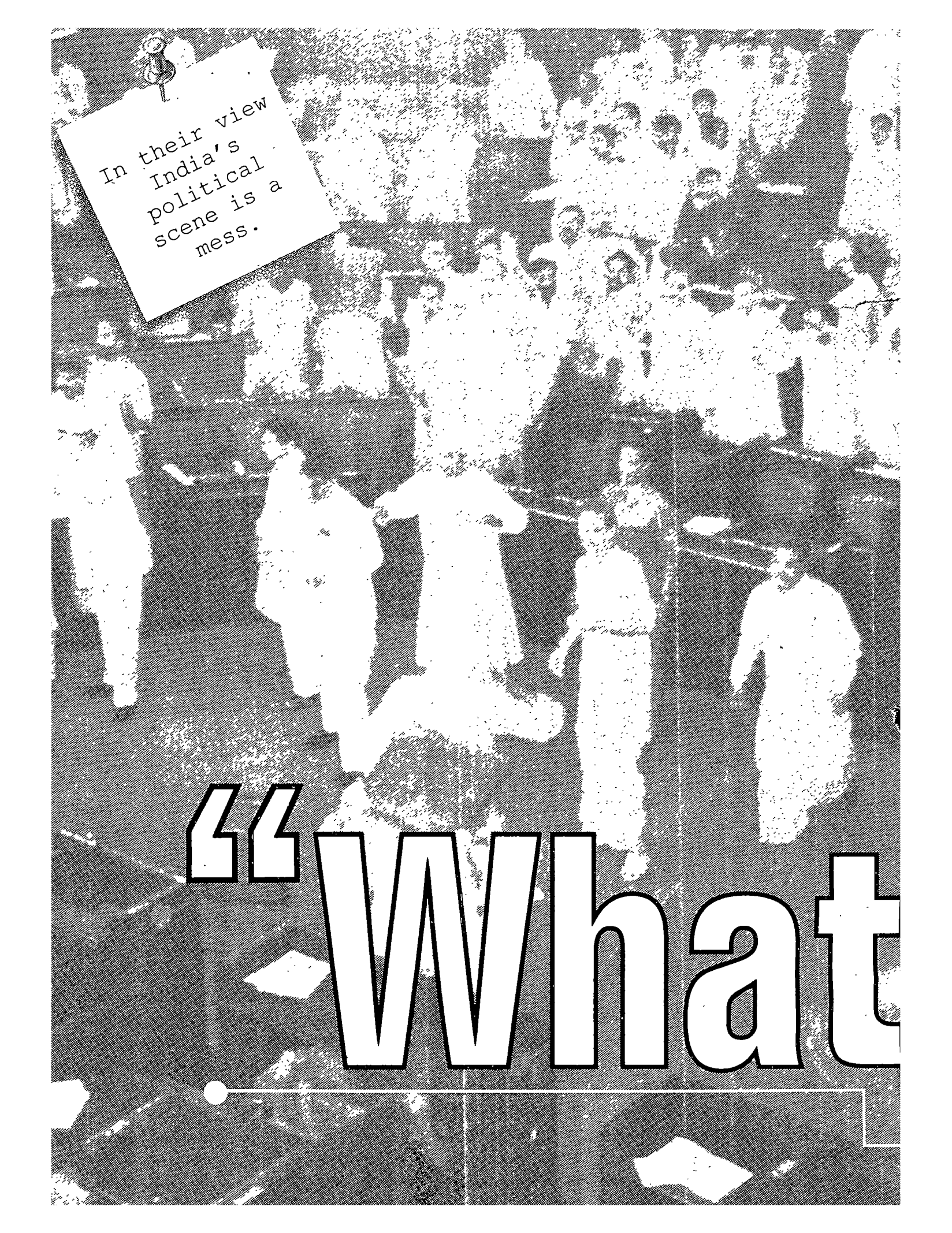
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- ENGLISH - 9.00 p.m.
- ENGLISH - 12.30 a.m.

#### DAILY HEADLINES

- ENGLISH - 10.00 a.m.
- 12.00 p.m.
- 2.00 p.m.
- 4.00 p.m.
- 6.00 p.m.
- 11.00 p.m.
- 12.00 p.m.
- HINDI - 9.00 a.m.
- 11.00 a.m.
- 1.00 p.m.
- 3.00 p.m.
- 5.00 p.m.
- 7.00 p.m.
- 10.00 p.m.

# mess? "



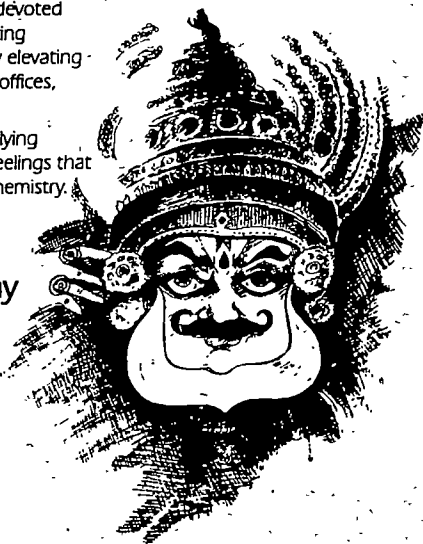
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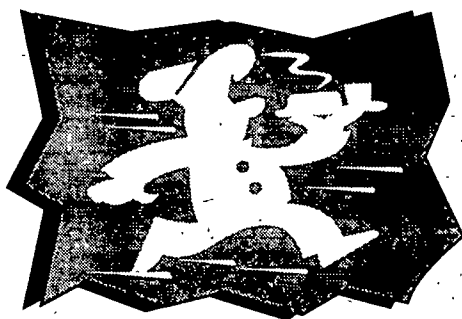
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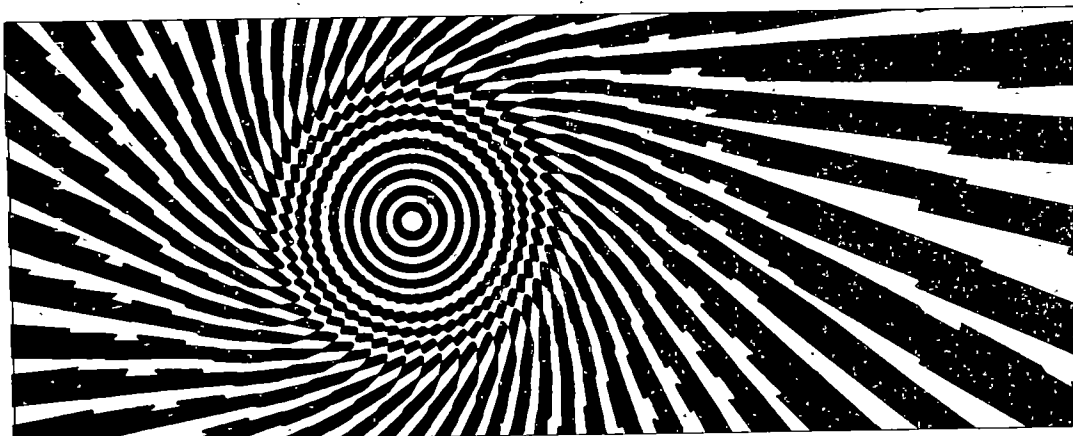
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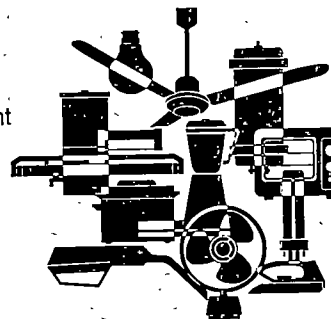
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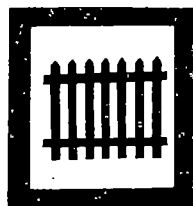
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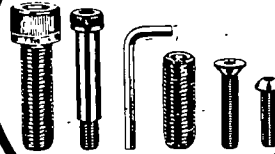


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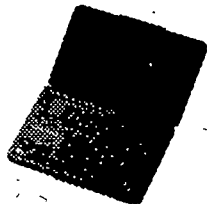
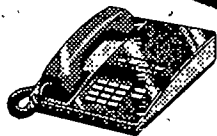
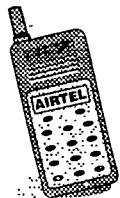
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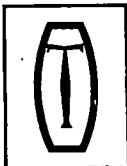
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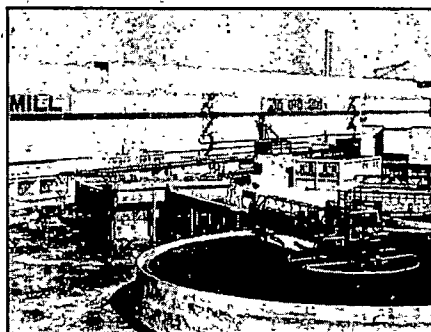
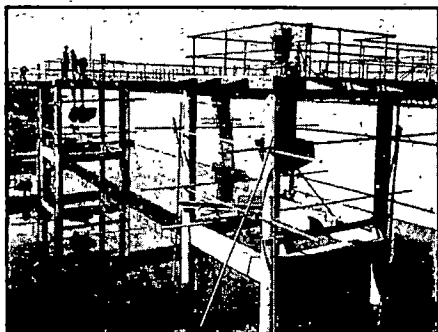
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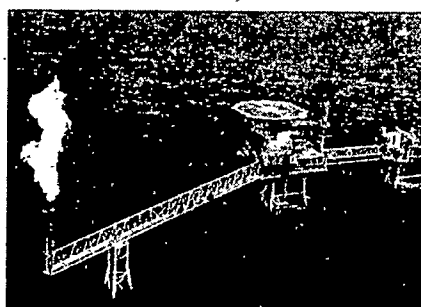
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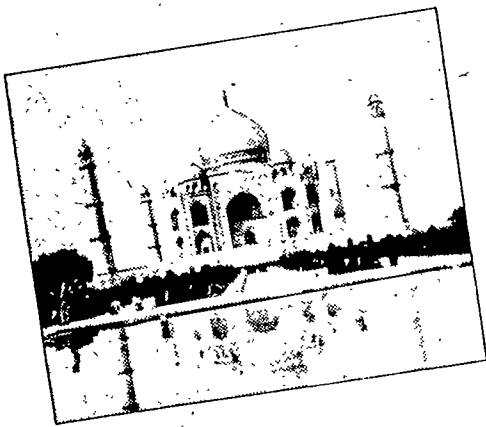
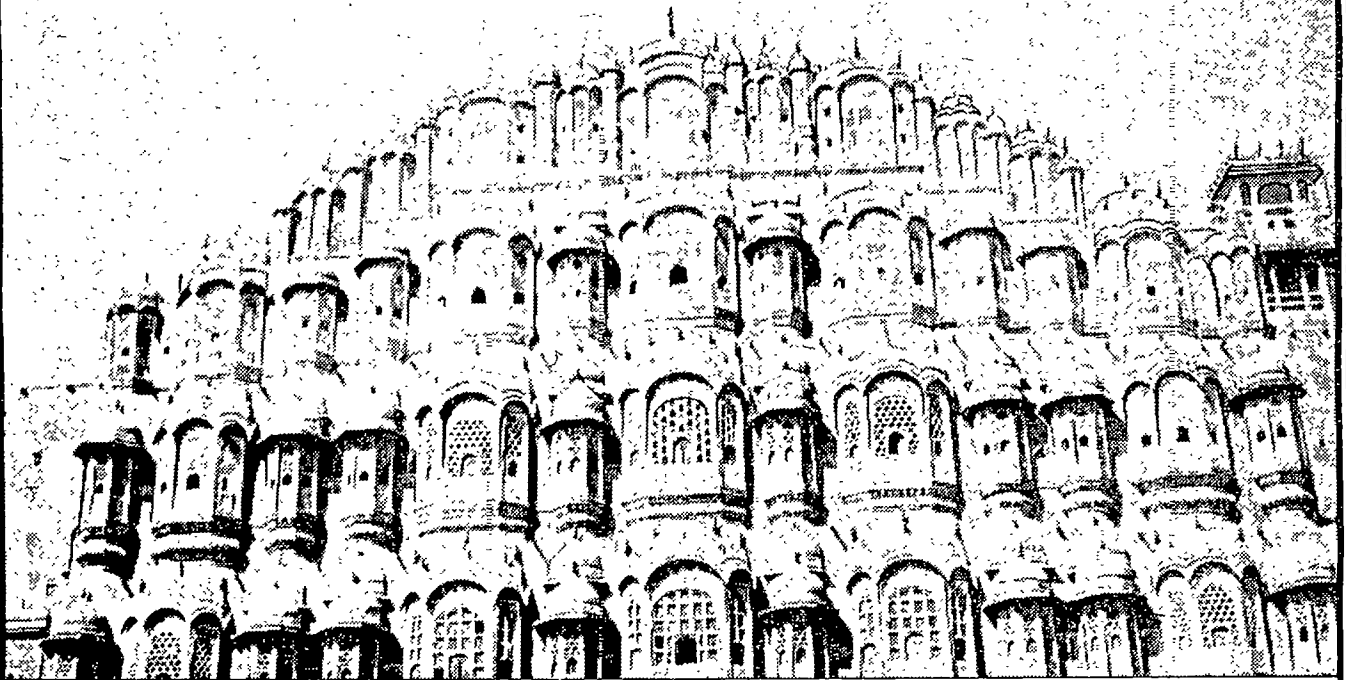
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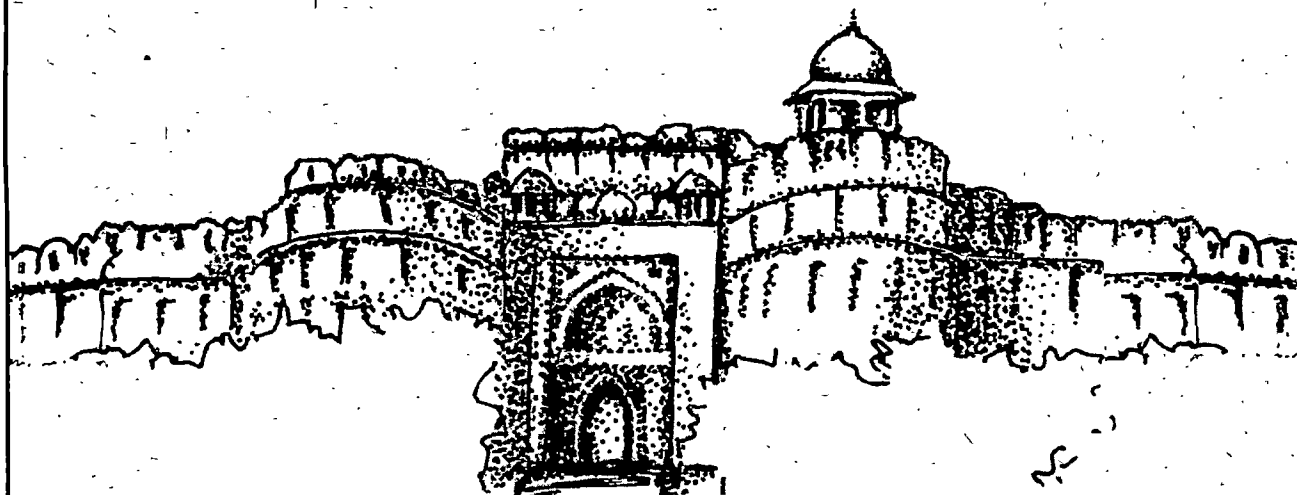
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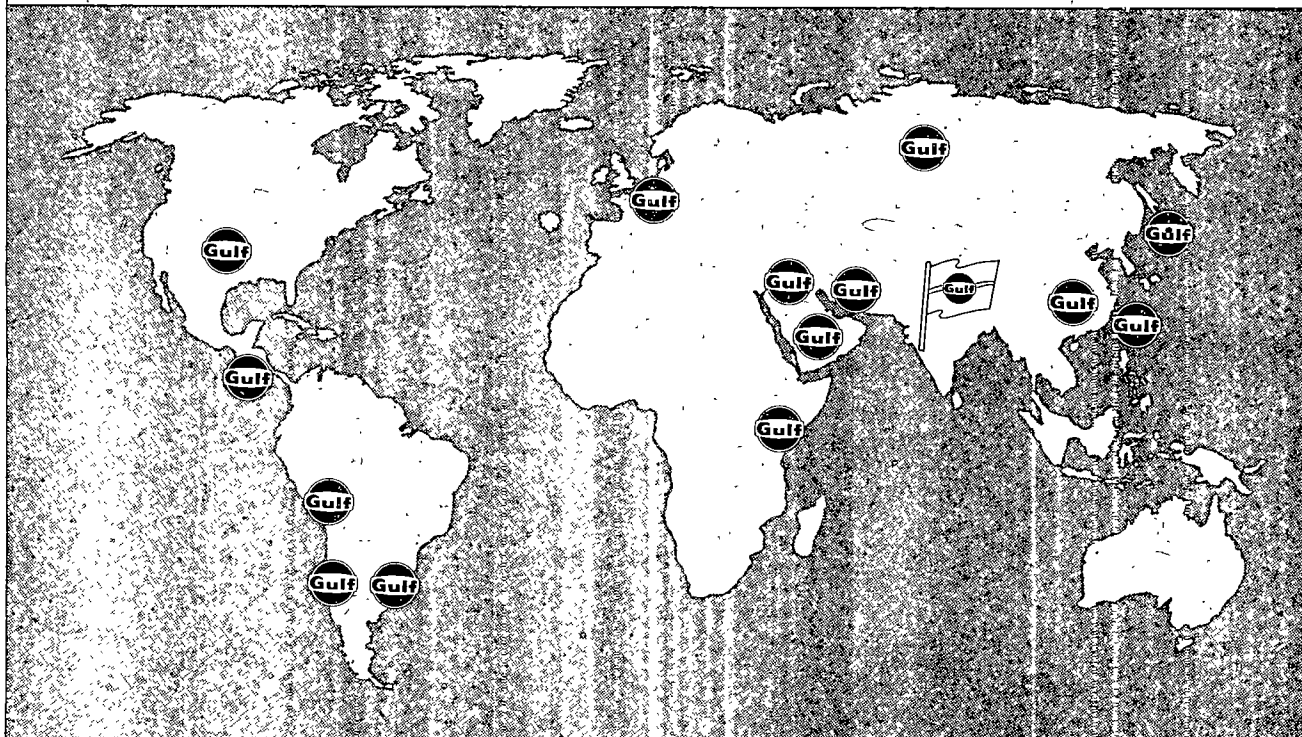
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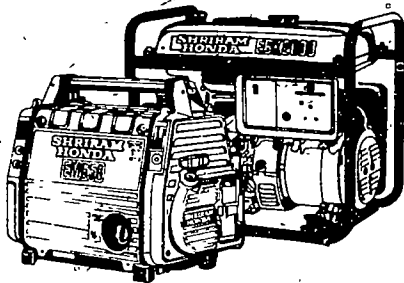
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- 24 **ANNUS HORRIBILIS**  
T.N. Ninan, Publisher and Editor, 'BusinessStandard'
- 30 **THE SOUTH IN ASCENDANT**  
Mahesh Rangarajan, Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi
- 34 **NO BREAKDOWN**  
Harish Khare, Deputy Editor, 'The Hindu'
- 39 **THE BEGINNING OF THE END**  
Vir Sanghvi, Consulting Editor, Ananda Bazar Group
- 44 **DARK SIDE OF THE MOON**  
Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Edit Page Editor, 'The Telegraph', Calcutta
- 47 **AMBEDKAR AND THE DALITS**  
Nalini Pandit, social scientist; Senior Vice President, Asiatic Society of Bombay
- 52 **KASHMIR: GETTING REAL**  
Bharat Karnad, Research Professor in National Security Studies, Centre for Policy Research, Delhi
- 58 **THE IDEA OF DEMOCRACY**  
Yogendra Yadav, Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi
- 62 **FROM VICTORY TO DEFEAT**  
Omkar Goswami, Editor, 'Business India'
- 66 **ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY**  
Sanjaya Baru, Senior Consultant, Research and Information System for the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries, Delhi
- 70 **SATYAMEVA JAYATE**  
Mani Shankar Aiyar, columnist; former Member of Parliament, Delhi
- 79 **JUDGE AND BE JUDGED**  
Rajeev Dhavan, Senior Advocate and commentator on public affairs, Delhi
- 85 **EDUCATION AND ITS MARKET VALUE**  
Dinesh Mohan, Professor, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
- 90 **FROM BOMBAY TO MUMBAI**  
Rajdeep Sardesai, Political Editor, NDTV
- 93 **CROSSING OVER**  
Sara Rai, writer, Allahabad
- 98 **REMEMBERING PARTITION**  
A dialogue between Javed Alam, political scientist and Suresh Sharma, historian, CSDS, Delhi
- 104 **THE POLITICS OF APOLOGY**  
Siddharth Varadarajan, Assistant Editor, 'The Times of India'
- 110 **GANDHI AND HISTORY**  
Sunil Khilnani, Senior Lecturer in Politics, Birkbeck College, University of London
- 116 **BACKPAGE**
- 117 **INDEX**
- COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdhury of DCA

# Annus horribilis

T N NINAN

WHO was happy in 1997? Start at one end and work through the various sectors of (and players in) the economy. Let's begin with the corporate sector. Ratan Tata had his hands full with yet another messy battle with a chief executive (in Indian Hotels), and a full-blown fracas with a state government (over Tata Tea). But leaving aside such diversions, there was another downcycle in Telco (lots of unsold trucks), no government clearance for his airline project, worries about ACC and Voltas, an indifferent year for Tisco, and a late-year decision to pull out of the Haldia petrochemical project. Not, one would think, a year to look back at with much satisfaction.

Take Kumarmangalam Birla. In his first full year at the head of the

group that Aditya Birla had bequeathed him, most of his companies had a tough time riding out the downcycle in commodity prices, a variety of projects were dropped, and the markets passed a harsh judgement on performance. In contrast, and almost uniquely, the Ambanis at Reliance had a great year. Eye-popping growth was topped by the promise of even more. The troubles of 1995-96 (remember the share controversy?) were forgotten, and indeed buried in another splash of business magazine eulogia.

If these three are the superleague of Indian companies, what about the senior league? The RPG group had its hands full of trouble. A power tariff dispute with the West Bengal government threatened to demolish CESC,

and in Mumbai Ceat Tyres continued to struggle. Thapar was caught in a seemingly endless family squabble over succession and control, even as the group companies continued to flounder. Asset sale continued in a cash-starved group. Bajaj struggled with loss of market share and declining sales. Customers were turning away for the first time since scooter manufacture began in 1960. The Singhanias found that none of their businesses was doing well – not tyres, not paper, not synthetics, not cement....

**B**ut nothing caught the unhappy state of India's vaunted business families as much as a report that Daewoo Motors had publicly warned against the sale of the house in which Bharat Ram (of the Shriram clan) has lived for half his life – because it was pledged to Daewoo as collateral for a Rs.15 crore loan. The loan has been mostly repaid and the house is safe with the family, but the group is riddled with business problems.

Some southern groups were all right – TVS, Murugappa, MRF. But groups like Chhabria, Modi and Mallya found the going tough, or were caught in messy disputes, or simply disintegrating. The established MNCs were all right in terms of profits, though both Lever and ITC had their run-in with the authorities. But the newer ones spilt greenbacks all over the Indian marketplace with little hope of getting them back soon (if ever): Electrolux, Whirlpool, Daewoo, Coca-Cola....

What did all this add up to? A comprehensive survey of the largest 1000 companies showed that all of them combined had taken a huge hit in the year – a 14 per cent drop in net profits, despite a 14 per cent growth in sales. No one can remember the last time this happened.

Industrial growth in the year to September was barely 4 per cent – the worst since the reforms began. The manufacturing sector was growing at only 0.7 per cent in September. Export growth was also at a low trajectory, at 4 per cent in dollar terms. At the half-way mark, excise and customs collections were running below the previous year. That was only to be expected, because the half-year results of over 1400 companies showed little growth in sales – but some profit recovery because of lower tax rates in the Budget, and lower interest costs.

Inevitably in a period of demand shortage, there was an investment famine – capital raised from the market declined, so did loans disbursed by the financial institutions. The capital goods sector suffered quietly. *Annus horribilis*, then, for the corporate sector.

**A**griculture had enjoyed record harvests the year before (6 per cent growth), and so little growth can be expected in 1997. More worrying was the decline in the long-term growth rate for farm output, with the decade of the '90s doing distinctly worse than the 1980s.

And in services, most sub sectors had a problem. In transport, there was a comprehensive mess in the railways, and a shake-out in aviation. Only two worthwhile companies survived in shipping, and the road transport sector was hit by poor, crowded roads on the one hand and lack of truck demand on the other.

Insurance remained unreformed, though the prospect of coming competition seemed to be perking up the existing public sector monopolies. And banking seemed headed for more trouble, with non-performing assets climbing across the board, and the growing suspicion that problems were being brushed under the carpet once

again. The situation seemed suspiciously like Japan's, in the limited sense that slow, halting reform was resulting in the problem getting steadily bigger.

**I**n the rest of the financial sector, NBFCs were going through a troublesome shake-out, and the financial institutions saw the lowest ever price-earnings ratios on their shares. The market was saying that no one believed the institutions' numbers on profits, non-performing assets and capital adequacy.

The stock market itself reflected angst. Though the index at year-end was substantially higher than at the start and some domestic buying had begun, the troubles in the corporate sector were reflected in low values all round – and the East Asian turmoil didn't help. There was a dangerous dependence on a few foreign institutional investors.

Telecommunications remained almost the lone sector which saw significant growth and investment, and the creation of the Telecom Regulatory Authority saw some real action in terms of sector governance. But power remained mired in policy *cul-de-sacs* with little corrective action at state level (which is where it matters). The Orissa experiment has come partially unstuck and only Haryana and Rajasthan so far have shown the stomach for some reform. A real surge in power investment is therefore unlikely till the second half of 1998, or even later.

What about the managers of the economy who oversaw this state of affairs? P. Chidambaram reacted to criticism about his cautious first Budget by packing everything into his second. But economic growth forecasts have had to be downgraded, the fiscal deficit is going to climb because tax collection has fallen short and give-

always have not been controlled. Much of the promised legislation (insurance regulatory authority, and revamped laws for companies, income tax, sick companies, etc.) never came through before the government fell, and the sharp drop in the inflation rate (less than 3.5 per cent) seemed only to point to the underlying problem of insufficient demand.

The RBI governor dropped interest rates and eased up on money supply in a belated effort to undo the damage that began with the liquidity squeeze in late 1995. He then bought fresh trouble by maintaining that the rupee was not over-valued. Encomiums were heaped on him at the end of what was seen as a good five-year innings. But industry was still in recession, the rupee was clearly out of line and had killed export momentum, and banking reform had been too slow. It looked suspiciously like a case of the operation being declared successful while leaving the patient half dead.

**T**he commerce minister did nothing to help exports recover, and unrealistic growth targets had to be junked. Trade negotiations were bungled on almost every occasion, so that he ended up eating crow. But he didn't seem to mind too much, because he did it again, and again.

The industry minister spent his time squabbling over a car company, and tried hard to steal the attention from the finance minister. That's a hopeless task in the post-licence raj era, and the announcing of public sector *navaratnas* made little difference because the real test of mindset lay elsewhere—in the disinvestment proposals that gathered dust.

The agriculture minister lived in the past (as did the deputy chairman of the planning commission), the railway minister was off the rails most of the time, and most of the other single-

industry ministries tried hard to stay relevant when logic suggested they should mostly be wound up.

**I**n short, the managers of the system were either unlucky, or incompetent, or irrelevant nuisances. True, two minority coalition governments managed to push the reform process forward (the biggest achievement was a start to de-regulating petroleum, followed by the decision to scrap the urban land ceiling), but in terms of immediate economic management, the collective wisdom brought to bear by the system's minders fell short. It is hard to see too many people getting upset if most of these individuals do not return to their last posts, but it is even more difficult to see who could come in and improve performance.

But the economy is growing at 5.5 or 6 per cent; how can that be such bad news? The answer might lie in the Pay Commission hand-out, which works out to well over 1 per cent of GDP, and which straightaway boosts the economy by as much. Take that away and the economy might grow at barely 4 per cent this year. Most of the crisis-ridden East Asian economies have done better than that. So much, then, for the self-serving argument by the outgoing prime minister that India must be cautious about reform after seeing what has happened in East Asia. Economic illiteracy is obviously no barrier to holding high office.

To get back to the original question, who was happy in 1997? Not the consumer—who kept his hands in his pockets except when he got price discounts, and even then only reluctantly. Not the investor—real estate prices stayed low, gold was at its lowest level in more than a decade (in inflation indexed rupees), and share prices reflected poor price-earning ratios. And not the producer, who saw shrinking margins in more competitive markets.

Is this a passing phase, or have the real solutions evaded discovery? It's possible to argue, for instance, that this is the great Indian shake-out. For industries have grown, while companies have run into trouble. The winners (like Reliance) aren't complaining, the losers are wailing and thrashing about. There is over capacity, as in cars: production capacity is being built to produce well over a million cars, while demand is less than half a million. And steel (two or three new plants have come on stream). And cement (again, a bunching of extra capacity). And most consumer durables, where companies simply overestimated the size of the market. If over-capacity is the problem, a shake-out is inevitable.

**A**nd because the process is far from complete, the pain will linger. Shouldn't there be a shake-out in commercial banking, for instance, just as there has been in merchant banking, share broking and other financial sub-sectors? Aren't there too many polyester manufacturers? Then think of the further shake-out as the protective walls that remain come tumbling down. Quantitative restrictions on imports (of consumer goods and agricultural products, mainly) will go in phases over six years. Tariff walls will come down still further. True competition has just begun.

The real danger in this scenario is that the losers will outnumber the winners. Manmohan Singh was always careful to ensure that this did not happen, so that the logic of reform found enough advocates. But if more and more people show no stomach for this economic medicine, it is because they see themselves as the losers.

But who are these losers? Most of them are gate-keepers to the Indian market. The bureaucrat, who wants discretionary control so that he can

extract rent from the system (a house in a nice part of town, a job for the son, perhaps some money when it matters, or expensive gifts at Diwali). In the commerce, industry and finance ministries; not to speak of RBI, SEBI and other bodies, the case-by-case approach lingers. The gate-keeper decides who is let in, and who is not.

**T**he politician, meanwhile, wants to be able to play with the exchequer so that he can buy votes – free power, bank loans that don't have to be repaid, and so on. If electricity distribution is privatised, or the banks go out of government control, how can you offer these goodies?

The third category of gate-keepers comprises businessmen who knew that an industrial licence was usually a licence to print money. If there are no licences and the gates are thrown open, how do you negotiate majority shareholding in joint ventures where you contribute nothing? So suddenly, India's great business families look like the emperor in his new clothes.

The role of the little girl, who blurted out the truth about the emperor's clothes, is being played by the stock market. The market capitalisation of many companies and groups has fallen to such low levels that almost any company in the system can be bought with a couple of hundred million dollars. Many companies are valued on the market at less than book value. Investors are saying what they think of family managements, rather than they don't think much of them; either their ability or their integrity. It cannot be a coincidence that the international players almost always command a higher price-earnings ratio.

Yet, the fact is that the Indian marketplace remains an area of huge opportunity. There is a fantastic latent demand that can be fed with products

and services. There is a famine in power, telecom growth will be explosive, and rapidly growing product markets always present opportunities for establishing new brands or occupying new niches. But the management challenge this represents, coupled with the financial challenge of raising money from investors, seems to be beyond the ability of most business families – who also seem unable to compete in the market for the best professional talent.

Inevitably, then, market consolidation is the current phase of the game, with the survivors entrenching themselves and the weak opting out. Look at pharmaceuticals (an acquisition a month), or cement. Or polyester and cigarettes. Tomorrow, it will be cars and steel. And at some stage, the banks. If the trend already evident in these areas spreads across more sectors, something like half the companies in the top 100 ranking today could cease to exist as significant players three or five years from now. And only a dozen or so will actually be strong enough to be global players.

**A**long among the companies, Reliance seems to have understood the new rules. It has gone global in its search for capital, bench-marks itself internationally in everything it does, is adopting international accounting standards, and has the drive and focus to build rapidly.

Watch the stock market already reading all the signals about the changed rules in the Indian corporate world, because there is a 'flight to quality'. Look at the portfolios of the two biggest foreign investors (Capital and Morgan Stanley), or the big domestic mutual funds. It is interesting that many of them have put more faith in public sector companies than in family-managed private enterprise. The real giants in the system are now

being recognised – BHEL, VSNL, IOC, MTNL. Some of these companies have gate-keeping privileges today, which will disappear with time. The obvious example is VSNL. But in an interesting twist, it is these companies which are seen as having professional managements and (in cases where the government has divested significant equity) no controlling shareholder who meddles around.

**A**s a corollary, notice the slow death of the diversified conglomerate, and the rise to prominence of the focused company. The old theory, developed in the American context by Harold Geneen of ITT, was that a company with management strengths could get into any business, apply sound business principles, and make the venture a success. India's own corporate history was shaped by the managing agency system – investors in England knew nothing about local conditions in India, and so hired local 'agencies' to manage the businesses for them. A typical agency would therefore be running a jute mill, some tea gardens, perhaps a textile mill or engineering unit or coal mine, and in some cases even banks and insurance companies. When the foreign-owned managing agencies began moving out, or sold out to Indian entrepreneurs, the Indian business conglomerate was born.

It is a business model that has parallels in other systems. The Japanese have the *keiretsu*, which more than anything else seeks market power – power over customers, suppliers, policy-makers, financiers. Profits and returns to shareholders are only a secondary objective, and flow from the over-all acquisition and wielding of power.

The Korean *chaebol* followed the same route. Cross-business financing was common, because once

again the key business objective was market share, not return on shareholder funds. The system now stands discredited in the wake of the collapse of the *won*; many chaebols are in trouble because they are hopelessly over-extended financially, and because the returns are not commensurate with the high gearing ratio. The IMF has stipulated enterprise-level reform in its bail-out package.

Italy has its multi-business enterprises too (IRI and ENI), which are state-owned to boot. But as in so many other things, the American system has now been found to be the best thought out. Market power is not really achievable across the board when a national economy opens out to the world (note that the Japanese and Korean systems are still intensely protectionist). At best, companies can hope to do well in a couple of chosen fields. At the end of the day, the business has to maximise shareholder return, and in today's environment, focused companies achieve that best.

**T**here is of course the Harvard professor of Indian origin who argues that in a developing economy, diversification by companies makes sense – so many opportunities are there to be exploited, and there is no merit in turning away from them. This would explain, for instance, the rush into telecom by companies with no prior experience in the field, not to speak of the new fascination for power generation (no imported competition possible here!).

For all that, it is clear that business houses simply cannot acquire sufficient expertise in a wide variety of businesses, and they have to specialise. Among other things, this is the route to capturing market share in your chosen category, developing powerful brands, and staying totally focused. Ranbaxy Laboratories does

well for precisely this reason, exporting close to half its turnover. Reliance has focused on integration backwards and forward. Other companies that have stuck to the knitting, and done well, include the Hero group, Gujarat Ambuja Cement, MRF and Eicher.

**I**f Tatas didn't have to worry about pharmaceuticals and steel, trucks and computer hardware, hotels and caustic soda, electricity and printing presses, refrigerators and economic forecasting, paints and computer software, airports and fertiliser, bearings and tea gardens, and a dozen other businesses, they could easily build a world class company or two, and ones that could compete on the world stage. But Ratan Tata's efforts to focus have made slow progress, though fresh impetus might now be there after the group's adoption of the McKinsey report. Kumarmangalam Birla may do the same on the basis of a report to him by Arthur D. Little. Clearly, business consulting will remain a boom business.

The short point is that Indian business now has to do business differently. The evolving situation also implicitly dilutes the family role in a company, simply because there is no room for all family members to get into management (as there would be in a diversified conglomerate). Even successfully diversified companies like Larsen and Toubro are getting round to accepting the theory on core competence. In future, therefore, you will not have India's top 20 groups, or a listing of the leading business families – because many of them have already faded away (the Mafatlals, Modis and Sarabhais being obvious examples) and more are on their way out.

What you will have, however, are a couple of strong companies in each field. Watch the slug fest between

Lever and P&G; or the Coke-Pepsi war. The petrochemical market could be sewn up in India by Reliance and IPCL.

Where does this leave Indian business? Two weaknesses that seem to run across the board will limit horizons. One is technology (most Indian companies don't have it – Asian Paints is one exception, and Ranbaxy perhaps another); the other is the ability to develop brands. This will confine most Indian companies to the engineering sector, labour-intensive fields like software and diamond cutting, raw material processing sectors like textiles, commodity sectors like steel, cement and petrochemicals, or non-tradeable sectors like power, or sectors which require strong trading skills. Survival is also easier at the small and medium enterprise level, where companies feed the larger ones and have a clear role as entrepreneur-driven entities. The good news is that this is a wide enough field to leave open a large slew of opportunities.

**T**he other challenge will be finance. Japan, Korea and other emerging economies provided cheap capital to their growing businesses as they established dominance. In India, the business families acquired capital through exploiting a protected market, or siphoning out project funds, or taking shareholders for granted, or organising a mesh of cross-holdings that gave management control. The first three options now have limited feasibility, so keeping faith with the retail and institutional investor is central to the business of raising capital for future growth. The alternative is to stay small, and many families seem to prefer this option. The ones that think big will have to face the challenge of professionalisation in a more comprehensive way than has been done so far.



But even if companies do their homework, they need a business environment in which they can function and grow. The current recessionary state therefore needs urgent redressal, if 1998 is not to be a repeat of annus horribilis. Remember that September (the latest month for which statistics are available) registered just 0.7 per cent manufacturing growth over September 1996.

**B**ut fresh investment is unlikely to come from the government because it does not have the money, and in any case incompetently run ministries do not have the ability to spend even the budgeted allocations. Fresh investment can also be spurred by private investment, but the key areas where there is no over-capacity as yet are all in infrastructure sectors, and in most of these policy changes continue to be needed. The reform process is therefore central to stimulating investment.

Finally, a revival of consumer demand would do the trick. This can be both domestic and overseas. For the latter, a drop in the rupee value is essential, so that exports can recover. And exports, don't forget, now account for 10 per cent of GDP. Domestic demand is a trickier business when there is political uncertainty and no feel-good factor. This is where the system's last crop of minders have failed to deliver. With another election coming up, the question marks therefore loom large.

But much the bigger question is posed by East Asia, where currencies have been tumbling, growth rates dropping and businesses frantically searching for new ways to survive. At one level, the East Asian virus should not spread to India – our current account deficit is less than 1.5 per cent of GDP (compared to 4 per cent for South Korea and 8 per cent for Thailand), the short-term foreign debt is

much less than the reserves (unlike Thailand, for example), there is no capital account convertibility (so there are limits on capital flight). And no asset bubble. Besides, the Indian banking system's exposure to real estate is no more than 2 per cent of total banking assets, compared to as much as 20 per cent elsewhere. Indian businesses have also not been financing long-term projects with short-term finance to the same degree as many South-East Asian companies, and corporate gearing ratios are more realistic than in South Korea.

It is also possible to argue that the East Asian crisis is not yet a crisis for the world economy, because the United States and Europe remain largely unaffected. The US has reported record job creation in November, and Europe is in fact into recovery mode. The IMF forecasts that global economic growth will drop from the 4.3 per cent expected earlier to 3.5 per cent. That's not catastrophic.

**B**ut to stop the argument at this stage would be foolhardy, because East Asia is next door and what happens there is going to impact in ways that many Indian businessmen may not yet have realised. Consider, for instance, the prospect of all the surplus capacities in areas like petrochemicals, cement, steel, aluminium, fibres, paper, tyres and a host of other commodities that will be seeking markets elsewhere because the East Asian economies cannot absorb them. And then think of the prices at which these commodities will be available in the wake of the devaluation of the won, baht, ringgit, rupiah and even yen.

At the very least, Indian exporters will be priced out. But much worse, competition from imports will give domestic manufacturers a torrid time within the country. And since most Indian companies are commodity pro-

cessors (and do not own strong brands or cutting edge technology), this price competition can have devastating consequences.

**T**he obvious defensive manoeuvre should be to let the rupee drop instead of the Reserve Bank continually trying to prop it up and expending dollar reserves (which are already down by a couple of billion). A cheaper rupee will make imports more costly, and encourage more exports – exactly what the system requires. But the system also has a fascination for a strong currency (as though it is a sign of national machismo), and the danger is that the rupee will be kept too high and tariff walls raised all over again as an alternative to devaluation. This then risks slipping back into the old mindset of a high rupee and high tariff walls combining to protect the domestic market while discouraging exports – and thereby creating a siege mentality all over again.

It should also be expected that funds earmarked for the emerging markets by the global investment companies will be sharply reduced. So while India may seem like a calm pond, secluded from the stormy ocean next door, it is entirely likely that the inflow of portfolio investments will drop; indeed, there could well be a net outflow. This will put its own pressure on the rupee, and on the stock market – which has understandably been showing nervousness.

The past couple of years have seen the economy become a victim of macro-economic mismanagement, principally through over-valuation of the rupee and a liquidity squeeze, combined with under-investment in the infrastructure. If the policy responses are wrong again, then 1997 will be a picnic for Indian business, compared to what lies in store in 1998.

# The South in ascendant

MAHESH RANGARAJAN

THE reservoir at Poondi to the north of Chennai dates back to the days when the Congress stalwart, Satyamurthi was chairman of the city municipal committee and pushed through the project to help meet the demand for water among its residents. In a small ceremony in early 1997, the chief ministers of the two states, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh came together at Poondi to celebrate the completion of a scheme to augment the supply of water. While thanking Chandra-babu Naidu for sharing Andhra's waters, the Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi praised the former as a *dalapati* of Indian politics. The word itself means a general or a commander. Of course, the younger man repaid the compliment in full measure and hailed his counterpart as his own *thalaivar* or leader. The terms were apposite.

The shift in the terms of power towards the regions and away from the Union has been one of the most significant developments in Indian politics in recent years. The times have changed and decisively. When at the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, Congress party president Kamaraj Nadar's name was suggested as successor, he preferred to play king

maker. It did not seem realistic to expect someone outside Uttar Pradesh to become prime minister. But with the Hindi-speaking belt experiencing deep social cleavages between the Mandal classes, upper castes and Dalits, the South has gained considerable political clout. Not only that. Kamaraj was still part of the Congress system, which was able to incorporate and accommodate the aspirations of upwardly mobile groups. It is a measure of how deep the changes have been that in his own lifetime his home state passed out of Congress hands in 1967, never to return.

The Congress has continued to be a major player in the peninsular region even as it now faces terminal decline in the Gangetic basin. It leads a formidable alliance with smaller parties in Kerala and is the chief opposition in the Telugu and Kannada speaking regions. But the late 1990s have seen Congress fortunes slip in a manner that may have significant long term consequences at an all India level. In the past, the South always remained its last bastion in times of electoral adversity. This was the case in 1977 and again in 1989. The minority government of P.V. Narasimha Rao in turn would never

have been possible had his party not won 95 of the 130 seats in the southern states in the general elections of 1991. Yet, five years later the pendulum swung sharply the other way and it is the United Front that has that many seats in the South.

Such figures and the deeper shifts that they represent would have carried little import had the Congress held its ground elsewhere in the country. But its decline in the North has been precipitous and sharp. Further, the only other party with all India aspirations or pretensions, the Bharatiya Janata Party, has as yet been unable to establish and sustain a position of dominance in Uttar Pradesh or attain power in Bihar. The situation then is that while Congress dominance is over, no single force has yet emerged to fill the vacuum. Since 1991, the forces of Hindutva have held most of the Lok Sabha seats from U.P. In the same period, however, they only held power in Delhi for less than a fortnight. This means that the demographic weight of the Hindi region in general and of Uttar Pradesh in particular counts for a lot less now than ever before. In any case, the BJP hardly exists in the South, except for Karnataka where it is a strong third force.

**A**s long as it aspires to lead a coalition regime in Delhi, the Hindutva party has to win over regional allies outside northern and western India. On the face of it this is not so difficult. After all, it joined hands with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam against Indira Gandhi in 1977 and was also part of the conclave politics initiated by N.T. Rama Rao in the 1980s. But the hurdle that it now faces is a serious one. At a time when diverse regional groups with a handful of seats in the Lok Sabha are able to shape the coalition government of the day at the Centre, they have little incentive to

join hands with a party that looks to them quite like a Congress clone in respect to centralising ambitions.

Its tacticians argue that at least it will not be a threat to regional forces in their own backyard. Unlike the Congress, it has little hope of coming to power in the states ruled by members of the Federal Front. Yet, it is precisely this factor that will make it easier for these parties to withstand pressures. At a time when regional identities are increasingly important, it is easier to resist pressures from a party that is largely external to local politics. If the BJP can do little to hurt the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, it is that much easier for the latter to resist it. The regional satrap is sustained in part by the image of a larger entity that he or she has to combat and contain.

**Y**et, there is a deeper pattern to this hiatus between the regional parties and the Hindutva forces which was not always evident in the Indira or Rajiv eras. The priority then was to defeat the Congress by pooling together opposition votes. After 1990, the picture changed, and decisively. Even more than the *mandir* issue, what forged a new set of relations was Mandal. V.P. Singh's implementation of reservations for the Other Backward Classes in Union government jobs sealed a compact with those who championed such demands from early in this century. So strong was the DMK's appreciation of his step that in mid-1996 it backed him as prime minister even after his party, the Janata Dal, made overtures to its arch rival the AIADMK on the eve of elections.

Mandal meant that the politics of OBC assertion had come of age in north India. It also meant that even as the BJP displaced the Congress as the premier vehicle of *savarna* Hindu aspirations in the North, its chief

contenders for power, the Mandalite leaders in that very region would have a common syntax and grammar with the regionalists in the South.

In turn, there are important differences in perception and priorities between the tactical and strategic calculations of a Mulayam Singh Yadav and his southern allies. In October 1997, when he strongly supported the use of Article 356 in Uttar Pradesh to dismiss the BJP ministry of Kalyan Singh, he was unable to have his way. One key factor was the united stand of the regional parties who have in the past felt the whiplash of Article 356, used by successive Congress governments to serve their own partisan ends. But there was more to the conflict than mere political self-interest. In much of Hindi-speaking India the country is seen as being constituted around the core of the Gangetic basin. The use of the term 'heartland' embodies and reinforces this view. In this version of the past, it is the North that is the kernel of the Indian nation. Even the lower caste led formations that challenge the upper caste led social order do not attempt to problematise the relationship between region and nation. But for N.T. Rama Rao or Annadurai, it was the re-negotiation of this equation that was the question of questions.

**T**he idea of *Aryavarta* being the core of India warms the cockles of the hearts of the Hindutva groups. In an ideal world they would hope to overcome and supplant regionalism, which is as divisive of India that is Bharat as are minority religious identities. Or so it would seem to them. As early as 1967, C.N. Annadurai, on his tour of the opposition ruled states of northern India, pointed out that the very notion of Hindi as a unifying link had its limitations even in the North. This was not to disparage the lan-

guage, much less to denigrate it, but to emphasise that there was a welter of cultures and identities at a sub-regional level within the Hindi speaking states that was also submerged in a bid to homogenise the language over the last century or so. More ominously, these attempts have often equated a particular variant of Hindi that is highly Sanskritic with not only the region but the Indian nation at large.

This overlap of Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan dates back beyond the Sangh Parivar. But all-over southern India it raises deep anxieties—not only in Tamil Nadu, long a citadel of sub-nationalism. One reason for this is that Muslim communities in the South—the plural is both deliberate and accurate—are strongly integrated into regional cultures. Regional party formations not only depend on them in terms of votes but have often incorporated them in their leaderships.

Muslims make up 11 per cent of Karnataka's population, nine in Andhra Pradesh, seven in Tamil Nadu and over 21 per cent in Kerala. Except in Hyderabad, Partition hardly left any scars (which makes one wonder why more historians do not investigate this other hidden history, along with writing about the scars of 1947). Such syncretism as exists in Tamil Saivite shrines where Allah is said to come riding on a tiger, does have its counterparts in the North. But the populist and anti-saffron formations are still in the early stages of appropriating and taking over such symbols from the Congress. In the South, even a leader like Jayalalitha with soft saffron inclinations, has taken care to be seen at Muslim dargahs and shrines.

**32** **A**ndhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are the two states in the South with bona fide regional parties. Of course, the Left-led Front in Kerala as well as

the Karnataka Janata Dal are both regional formations in a de facto sense. But for reasons that can only briefly be touched upon here, neither state has managed to intervene as decisively in shaping the contours of the ruling coalition as the other two states. In Kerala's case, the incredible success of the so-called Kerala model in creating a social welfare system, the likes of which does not exist anywhere else in continental South Asia, has over-shadowed the failure to expand the productive base in industry or to upgrade agriculture. Given its small size and population (20 seats in the Lok Sabha), the state is further handicapped by the fact that in a time of liberalisation, high labour costs inhibit fresh investment. Nor is the left-wing alliance as securely in power as its counterpart in West Bengal.

**K**arnataka was in many ways a contender to play a leading role, signified by the rise and eclipse in the eighties of R.K. Hegde and the eventual ascendancy to the prime ministership of India of H.D. Deve Gowda (1996-97). The latter was a first in many ways—the first of the Mandal classes, the first non-Congress premier from the South and perhaps the only head of government other than Charan Singh to have an agenda for agriculture. Despite ostensibly being from a national party, he also symbolised the impact of federalism within such formations as was evident in his views on centre-state relations. But Karnataka was unable to pull its weight after his exit from power.

There are two significant factors at work here. One is that the industrialisation of the state is in serious trouble due to problems of infrastructure, especially in the power sector. Further, much of its land area is highly prone to seasonal fluctuations in rainfall and the gestation period of its

ambitious irrigation projects may be longer than its leaders would care to admit. The other factor is socio-political. The Janata Dal in the state is governed mainly by a coalition of the dominant landed castes and Muslims, and it is the Congress that commands sympathy of most of the OBCs. This has made it easier for the Janata Dal to knit together winning coalitions at election time in the state but also led to sharp internal cleavages once it was firmly ensconced in power. Given the size of the state (six per cent of the Indian Union lies in its borders) and its numbers (only 26 seats in the Lok Sabha), the latter political factor has proved to be a limiting one. One has to turn to the other two states.

**B**ut there are important contrasts between the Tamils and Telugus. Tamil Nadu is the only province which had a full-fledged secessionist movement until the DMK gave up this demand and opted for federalism. The deep animosity over the bid to impose Hindi as a link language also contributed in no small measure to the growth of a distinctive Tamil identity. In Andhra Pradesh, the Telugu Desam was from the outset a regional party working within the constitutional framework. In the Tamil case, the movements for cultural assertion have strongly emphasised the non-Brahmanical and non-Sanskritic roots of their culture. In Andhra country, these voices have been more muted and Rama Rao at least was often ambivalent in his deft use of religious symbols and emblems. Even in these times of saffron tides, Karunanidhi is perhaps the only chief minister in India who can fob off demands for more power connections to temples by asking why deities with halos should need light bulbs!

But what this also means is that the TDP is unlikely to withdraw into a

regional fortress and make peace with whoever rules Delhi the way that the DMK did with Indira Gandhi from 1969 to 1976. From the very beginning the Telugu Desam has seen itself as a spearhead of regional forces that will displace the Congress from power at the Centre. The term *Bharat Desam*, used by N.T. Rama Rao in the eighties, was in fact prophetic. This is what the United Front, or at least the Federal Front, aspires to become.

What makes such an enterprise look achievable is the new economic context of liberalisation. Given their better infrastructure and relative political stability, the southern states are clearly better placed to attract investors, both Indian and foreign, than the North.

**N**o state is now as abuzz with news of new projects as Andhra Pradesh. Ironically, Chandrababu Naidu has the advantage of being a regional strongman as well as possessing the consensus-building ability of a Congressman of yore. But the major planks on which the Telugu Desam came to power in 1994—cheap rice for the poor (critical in a state with the largest number of landless labour in India) and prohibition (in response to a powerful grassroots women's upsurge), have both been modified, though not jettisoned. There have been significant initiatives in other respects: local bodies have been revived, the proposal to give wider powers to tribal gram sabhas is under serious consideration and the laws regarding cooperatives have limited the arbitrary powers of officials. The chief minister is probably alone among Indian politicians to openly champion small families as part of his Janmabhumi programme.

Andhra Pradesh has the advantage of both size and numbers. It is the largest of the southern states in both

land area and population. Its 1000 kilometer-long coastline is the site for new harbours and dockyards that will tie it to South East Asian trade routes. The deltas of the Krishna and the Godavari were sites of the Green Revolution around the same time as Punjab and Haryana, and could become one of the few areas in India with both agricultural prosperity and capital-intensive industry.

But much depends on the ability to deliver on promises of better governance. Andhra Pradesh is also a sharply polarised state. Its forested districts are the sites of intense social conflict over the control of timber wealth and land between tribal and dominant groups, the former often led by radical groups and the latter backed by police power. The lessening of disparities, or at the very least better provisioning of credit, food and land rights will test the Telugu Desam. Its record in office will determine whether or not it can keep the Congress at bay at home, a pre-requisite for the wider dreams and hopes of the TDP leadership.

**I**n fact the state that is poised to do better than any of the others is Tamil Nadu. Governments can hope to complete their term as there is a stable two-party system in place. Along with Pondicherry, the Tamil-speaking region accounts for 40 Lok Sabha seats, but even in the days of a Congress-AIADMK sweep it never had as many as nine Union ministers.

The economic underpinnings of a drive for power are significant. Given the absence of perennial rivers in the peninsula, the percentage of crop area under irrigation is a critical indicator of the viability of a state's agriculture. Tamil Nadu's is the highest in the region at more than 47 per cent. What is more, the Kaveri delta produces as many as three crops a

year, and in the Cumbum valley, rice yields touch six tons a hectare. The state has a social welfare system second only to Kerala's with none of the disadvantages that accrue from a large unionised labour force in an age of the dominance of capital. The entry of three auto majors is an indicator of its growing industrial muscle. In a range of products from auto components to electric pumps and hosiery, industry is going through a phase of expansion. It has been helped in no small way by the willingness to allow captive power plants, which has staved off the sort of power crisis that exists in some neighbouring states.

**R**ecent figures on state level expenditure during the Eighth Plan show Tamil Nadu ranked just behind Maharashtra in terms of its ability to utilise central grants and allocations. In fact, in terms of mobilising its own resources the former actually raised 50 per cent more than what was planned. In the same period, Bihar's level of use of 'state's own resources' was of the order of 5 per cent. West Bengal's was at 39 per cent. Further, in terms of social indices, Tamil Nadu is now just behind Kerala. Not only has literacy increased markedly to near the two-thirds mark, the birth rate has fallen sharply. The mid-day meal scheme expanded massively in the early years of AIADMK rule, has made a major contribution to better levels of nutrition among children.

The flipside is equally important. In political terms the DMK remains vulnerable to the kind of orchestrated howl that national parties as well as the media are capable of on matters of 'national security'. This was the case when its ministry was removed from office in 1991. Another bout of panic over the Rajiv assassination case was built up in late 1997. The ability of the regional forces to withstand such

pressures is presently under test. But the interesting part of the Tamil political spectrum is the AIADMK, whose response to the issue was in a language that was barely different from that of Advani or Arjun Singh. This is the real question for Tamil Nadu – whether it should be ruled by a bona fide regional party or one that will increasingly be a surrogate national party with a regional flavour. The Jayalalitha squad is the real Trojan horse for a future in which a strong pro-Centre, saffron alliance may find a fellow traveller. In that sense, the citadel of federalism also has its *bete noire* on its own soil.

More seriously, the rise of autonomous Dalit forces in Tamil Nadu calls into question even the most basic claims to legitimacy of the existing social order. While it may not have developed significant electoral clout, its very presence signals deeper dissonance in the ‘Tamil Nadu model’ of politics in which identity and culture score over economics.

All this may not have been on the minds of Messrs Naidu and Karunanidhi as they met at Poondi. But there is no doubt that we are at the threshold of a new era. The Congress system, in crisis since 1967, is wilting and the BJP is unable to fill its shoes. Irrespective of who rules in Delhi, increasingly the little queens and kings in the regions will shape our future. The South is better placed than the West on the one hand and the North on the other, both for reasons of relative social cohesion and communal peace, superior infrastructure and services. How its leaders use these opportunities will play a large role in reshaping a new idea of India. Much depends on how they resolve rather than exacerbate their own differences, as over water sharing. Much will hinge on their ability to go beyond tactics to articulate a vision that engages with allies and supplants the centralising project with a federal one.

## No breakdown

HARISH KHARE

FOR all the apparent chaos and for the sordidness inflicted on the nation by a shop-worn political class in this year of the Golden Jubilee of our Independence, we must be grateful that it did not come to as ugly a pass as it did in neighboring Pakistan, where unruly supporters of a prime minister felt compelled to invade the Supreme Court. And though the country was a seemingly helpless witness to the downfall of two prime ministers, the Centre did hold; the polity tried strenuously and with reasonable success to deal with the demands of maintaining a semblance of functioning order. Despite the fact that India finds itself having to undergo the unpredictable agony of a general election in less than 20 months, it can be asserted that by the end of 1997 the polity was in a healthier shape than it has been in for a long time.

The unsettled relationship between the Indian state and the citizen continued to be mediated without much violence and within the framework of a discernible political legitimacy. Till the horrible massacre in Bihar in December 1997, the polity played host to new experiments in political conflict and conciliation among groups and personalities without the outbreak of any large-scale violence. Undoubtedly violence and guns continued to dominate the

idiom of political discourse on the periphery (more in the north-eastern region than in Kashmir, or in Punjab), there was no occasion for any wholesale re-examination of the state-citizen relationship. Indeed, a general sense of tiredness could be detected among those external actors who in the last decade thought they had a justifiable role in pressurizing the Indian state to concede autonomous space to ethnic minorities or discontented individuals.<sup>1</sup>

**N**onetheless in 1997 the Indian governing elites found themselves constrained to learn – some to their cost, some to their advantage – the fundamental requirement of a constitutional democracy. A political democracy necessarily and inherently puts constraints on the power and authority enjoyed by each constitutional functionary; and, that the key to the success of parliamentary democracy, in a coalition era, hinges on the political elites' capacity to understand the need for mutual restraint, respect and reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

1. For a thoughtful discussion of the nagging problem of legitimacy and its implications, see Subrata K. Mitra, *Legitimacy, Governance and Political Institutions in India after Independence*, in Subrata K. Mitra and Dietmar Rothermund (eds.), *Legitimacy and Conflict in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997). It needs to be noted that the political leadership remains alive to the need to co-opt and propitiate those who choose to challenge the authority of the state. For instance, a Government of Manipur memorandum on law and order, submitted to the prime minister on 22 May 1997, notes: 'It is our irreversible commitment to protect and preserve the integrity of Manipur as a state and take up all positive steps to fight any divisive force and element working against the state and the country as a whole for ushering in peace and prosperity in this remote corner of India. We, in this context, appeal to you to invite misguided elements in Manipur to have talks with the government in order to solve the problem of insurgency in the state permanently.'

2. For an understanding of the requirements of restrained behaviour in a constitutional

Consequently the Indian polity was able to attend to the never-finished (and probably a never-finishable) basic task of democratic consolidation: making the Indian state forego its roguish impulses and instead to learn to respect the relentless logic of democratic urges and aspirations in an unequal and hierarchical society. And notwithstanding the middle classes' fashionable rubbishing of the political class and despite the corporate sector's inelegant impatience with the inherent uncertainties of parliamentary give-and-take, the democratic consolidation proceeded apace.

**T**his consolidation is neither easy nor can it be achieved overnight. The reason is simple. The elite consensus that underwrote the Indian development experiment in the first four decades visibly broke down in the early 1990s and has not yet been rebuilt. At the same time the old political majority that sustained the elite consensus has broken down, and is still in the process of being put together again. The next general election should provide us some clue as to whether the task of cobbling together such a new majority would be undertaken by the advocates of Hindutva or would it be left to the 'secular front' to put together a new coalition of the poor, the underclasses and forward-looking segments of the middle classes.

For the first time since the Constitution was inaugurated in 1950, the political system came to appreciate the delicate balance among various functionaries that has been worked into the constitutional scheme of things. Since the polity no longer acquires its institutional efficacy from

democracy, see Barry R. Weingast, 'The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law', *American Political Science Review*, June 1997.

the effective presence of the prime minister as the chief political executive in the country, the process of governance came to be shaped by a dynamic interaction among various functionaries. That this interaction was not allowed to overload the political system points to an hitherto unsuspected maturity among the governing elites.

**N**othing symbolized this new maturity more pointedly than the gentle but firm manner in which U.N. Biswas, the Joint Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation, was finally dealt with. The saga of Biswas' celebrated crusade against the then chief minister of Bihar, Laloo Prasad Yadav, constitutes a chapter in the story of how the limits of liberal democracy can be easily trampled upon by its presumed defenders. Both Biswas and his boss Joginder Singh proceeded on an assumption that the protection from the Supreme Court in pursuing their investigation in the fodder scam, also gave them a license to pursue personal agendas.

The most frightening denouement of this politics of hate and prejudice – which hinged on an instant trial and instant judgment by a middle class dominated print media and an upper class oriented electronic media – came when a bench of the Patna High Court encouraged U.N. Biswas to call in the army to arrest Laloo Prasad Yadav, rather than let the chief minister have the satisfaction of surrendering before the magistrate the next day. It is gratifying that this singular act of misplaced and misguided vigilance alerted the sober souls to the dangers of partisanship and eventually prompted the Supreme Court to step in to ensure that everybody stayed within limits of their authority and jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup>

3. See Harish Khare, 'The Joginder Singh

The judiciary itself became aware of the real danger of becoming both prosecutor and judge, of transgressing its own institutional jurisdiction and encroaching upon the institutional autonomy of the executive and the legislature. Though Justice J.S. Verma disappointed many admirers who were looking forward to his stewardship of the Supreme Court as the golden phase when the politicians' Aegean stables would be cleansed once for all, it must be said to his credit that through thoughtful and sagacious leadership he was able to dissuade the higher judiciary from an overtly interventionist agenda. And it was about time. The very real possibility of the judiciary deciding the fate of the high and mighty in the political world probably prompted a section of the judicial fraternity to play politics with the line of succession in the Supreme Court.<sup>4</sup>

If the judiciary resisted the temptation of overturning the intricate institutional balance between the courts and the executive, it was left to Rashtrapati Bhavan to take the initiative within the executive to define the ground rules for the constitutional head (president and governors) to exercise his/her discretion. In the first week of June 1997 President Shankar Dayal Sharma brought together the governors and the leaders of political parties to share views about evolving guidelines for the constitutional head in these times of coalitions. And though there was little enthusiasm for

the DMK's suggestion that Instruments of Instruction (for governors) be incorporated in the Constitution, there was appreciation for President Sharma's formulation that the constitutional head must function 'with due impartiality, independence, constitutional propriety and transparency, and uphold national interest paramount.'<sup>5</sup>

That Rashtrapati Bhavan could be a source of a much desired judicious restraint and thoughtful corrective action against a wayward council of ministers became evident in October 1997 when President K.R. Narayanan forced the Gujral government to review its decision to dismiss the Kalyan Singh ministry and to dissolve the Legislative Assembly in Uttar Pradesh. That Narayanan's exercise in presidential activism itself was not exactly in harmony with the metaphysics of the cabinet system of government was widely overlooked. Instead, the president was applauded for enabling the constitutionalists to carry the day in the Gujral cabinet against the rogues who were insisting on naked political retribution and calculation.<sup>6</sup>

The entirely welcome outcome of this unprecedented and unexpected presidential intervention ensured that during the next round of governmental crisis in November, no political leader was prepared to take Rashtrapati Bhavan for granted. A small but enormously significant gain against possible abuse of authority by a poli-

tically-inclined union council of ministers.

And as if the self-restraint hinted at by a watchful judiciary and a constitutionally-correct president were not enough, the speaker of the Lok Sabha emerged as a tough task master, demanding that Parliament not be taken for granted by the political leadership. When in March 1997 the coalition at the Centre came under strain on the question of law and order in Uttar Pradesh, the speaker ruled that 'lack of this unanimity of voice in the treasury benches in this regard is a matter of very serious concern which is inconsistent with the principle of collective responsibility of the council of ministers to the House as spelt out in Article 75 (3) of the Constitution. This responsibility is joint and indivisible. The matter is especially grave considering that U.P. is the most populous state in the country and law and order situation therein has implications for the country as a whole.'<sup>7</sup>

The point is not of a momentary embarrassment to the treasury benches but of yet another constitutional functionary feeling emboldened enough to strike a balancing note in a situation of indecisiveness at the heart of the ruling arrangement in New Delhi. Again when in the last week of November the Congress and the DMK members engaged each other in shouting slogans and disruptive activities in the Lok Sabha, P.A. Sangma invoked the magisterial authority of his office: 'Slogan shouting, demonstration and continued disruption of the business of the House, is a sad breach of the Resolution of the Golden Jubilee session of the House held from 26.8.1997 to 1.9.1997, as far as it concerns commitment in respect of orderly conduct-

Precedent', *The Hindu*, 7 May 1997. Also, Khare, 'Judicial Anarchy, Institutional Disarray', *The Hindu*, 2 July 1997.

4. An attempt is underway to interfere in the promotion of Justice M.M. Punchhi, the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court, as the Chief Justice of India in January 1998. See, Janak Raj Jai (ed.), *Assault on Judiciary* (Associated Legal Advisers, New Delhi, 1997). Also see Harish Khare, 'Why the Punchhi Controversy', *The Hindu*, 8 October 1997.

5. Address by the President, Dr. S.D. Sharma (Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, 2 June 1997).

6. See, 'UP Crisis: United Front in political and ethical disarray', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 November 1997. Also see, the prime minister's interview to Malini Parthasarathy, *The Hindu*, 1 June 1997 where I.K. Gujral suggests that 'consensus means you are explaining to each other' and underlines that 'we must learn coalitional culture.'

7. Lok Sabha Secretariat (Ruling by Hon'ble Speaker).



of business. It is also a mindless mockery of the people who have returned this House and appalling denigration of the very institution of Parliament which I shall not permit.<sup>8</sup> It is, of course, a different matter that Sangma too fell to the temptation of putting his oar in the troubled political waters and tried his best to get the president's nod for a prime ministerial role in a national government.

**A**ll said and done, this orderly search of institutional space by various constitutional functionaries – without feeling totally smothered by the heavy hand of a dominant political personality or centre of power, and without trying to overstep limits – has contributed towards democratic consolidation. What is more, this process of democratic consolidation was sustained by the political elites' hitherto unsuspected willingness to learn the rites of accommodation and the protocol of sharing power.

Notwithstanding all the criticism that came the Congress party's way for withdrawing support from the Deve Gowda government, that episode reminded one and all of the need for learning the code of conduct and rites of accommodation. The United Front was an extraordinary conglomeration of political personalities who had nothing in common – no shared memories, no shared collective association, no sense of joint struggles – except a burning desire to share power. It was not easy for these leaders to work, leave alone produce a synergy or even a convergence of political perspectives.

After Deve Gowda was given the boot by Sitaram Kesri, it was left to his Home Minister, Indrajit Gupta to point out that his former boss's

'basic weakness was his inability to devise norms and procedures for handling the functioning of a coalition.' More than this failure to measure up to the demands of a coalition era, there was a marked absence of comradeship among the Gowda cabinet ministers. As Gupta noted: 'These were mostly problems of communication. Very often when we should have met we were not able to meet either because of there being lack of time, mine or his, or may be because of styles of functioning. Styles of functioning are very important. And then my background, my political background, my social background and everything, is very different to Mr. Deve Gowda's. You know from where he came and naturally you cannot expect that he and I will be on the same wavelength.'<sup>9</sup>

**W**ith or without prompting from Sitaram Kesri, the United Front crowd had a difficult time appreciating one another. For instance, in July 1997 the DMK threatened to pull out of the Gujral government because K. Karunanidhi suspected some of the UF leaders of working on a 'personal Common Minimum Programme'. A couple of months later, the Agriculture Minister, Chaturanan Mishra publicly engaged the finance minister in a dispute that had less to do with differences over policy and more to do with the CPI leader's lack of familiarity with the by-lanes of decision making in a cabinet system.

Beyond personalities, this problem of evolving a *esprit de corps* does not lend itself easily to a solution. There was a time in the early years after Independence when there was a certain socio-economic commonality to the entire political class, a condition

that ensured that disputes and differences, either along ideological or party lines, did not result in an erosion of civilities and niceties. After the bitterness of the Indira and Rajiv years, and after the total churning of recent years in the composition of political elites in the post-Mandal era, the UF experiment forced the political leaders to learn through the hard way the necessity of bargaining, sharing and conceding power.<sup>10</sup>

**N**othing underlined this imperative more acutely than the inability of the United Front bosses to get on with the supporting Congress and its boss, Sitaram Kesri. It was obvious that as prime minister, Deve Gowda was not sufficiently clued into the complexities of internal equations within the Congress and had unfortunately allowed himself to be influenced by the negative perceptions of his friends such as Chandra Shekhar and P.V. Narasimha Rao towards Kesri. This resulted in a calculation that the Congress need not be treated with the requisite civility and that the UF government could get away with isolating and targeting individual Congress leaders in various legal cases, some suspected to be contrived and some reported to be genuine.

The political class watched with dismay as the Gowda regime tried to use the minatory reach of the CBI or Enforcement Directorate and other coercive agencies to make political rivals fall in line. The end result was that Gowda lost his prime ministerial chair and the political elites learnt a vital lesson that 'in this age of coali-

8. Statement read out by the speaker in the Lok Sabha (text courtesy Lok Sabha Secretariat).

9. See Indrajit Gupta's interview with Home TV, telecast on 21 April 1997 (text, Home TV). Also see Javed M. Ansari, 'United Front: widening schisms', *India Today*, 28 July 1997.

10. The churning in the composition of the nominal political elites can be gauged from the fact that the just dissolved 11th Lok Sabha had as many as 287 members who were elected to Parliament for the first time; of these, 117 had no experience whatsoever of ever having served in a state legislature or having played any other legislative innings.

tion politics, no political party or leader can hope to get away by exercising the power and authority disproportionate to his real strength and acceptability. Leaders who refuse to understand this would end up only frustrating the country's need for a stable and coherent governance.<sup>11</sup>

The dire necessity to sup with your presumed enemy was starkly illustrated by the BSP-BJP's elaborate pact to share power in Uttar Pradesh. Again, after the bitterness over the departure of Deve Gowda from the prime minister's office, both the Congress and the UF found themselves having to do business with one another. What is more, both felt constrained to give a written undertaking to the president of the Republic that the two groups would put in place mechanisms of coordination between the Congress and the Gujral government. That the two sides could not honour this undertaking – as well as the breakdown of the BSP-BJP arrangement – only underlines the fact that the political elites are still having difficulty cultivating the habit of accommodation and reconciliation.

**T**hat the political class appeared willing to learn a thing or two about restrained behaviour and otherwise gave evidence of trying to grow up ought to be juxtaposed with the wider context of unrelenting and unfair intellectual hostility. Management of the economy appeared to have been largely insulated from the inadequacies and insecurities of the political leadership. That ensured at the minimum that the emerging consensus on 'economic reforms' remained essen-

tially unchallenged, notwithstanding the left parties' delusion that their presence in the ruling arrangement in New Delhi had helped reverse the one-sided allocation of economic resources.<sup>12</sup>

**S**imultaneously the 'cultural market' could not be liberated from the stranglehold of essentially elitist and not entirely wholesome forces and individuals.<sup>13</sup> The unequal battle between the cultural and economic elites, and the political/constitutional and other representative voices appears to have entered a decisive phase. The party system is trying to adjust itself to the changed nature of political conflict in the aftermath of the retreat of the Indian state from the commanding heights of the economy.<sup>14</sup> Viewed in this larger background the orderly upheavals in the political world must be seen as part of a continuing struggle over the soul of India.

12. 'Political opportunism, loot and plunder of state coffers, criminalisation, five-star culture have hardly left any difference between these forces and the earlier rulers. In the name of leftism, CPI and CPI(M) have also wasted their time in political manoeuvrings.' See *Liberation*, central organ of the CPI(ML), September 1997. It needs to be noted that despite the ideological, intellectual, and policy concessions made to the votaries of economic reforms, the Indian state is still having a difficult time making the rich and the powerful pay taxes. The finance ministry has been constrained to rope in the likes of cricketer Kapil Dev and sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan to impress upon the rich the advantage of '30 per cent tax, 100 peace of mind.'

13. For a coherent perspective on the emergence of a cultural mafia, see Khare, 'The Bent and the Beautiful Age' (16 January 1997), 'Manufacturing Political Correctness' (27 August 1997), and 'Beyond Mr. Murdoch's Temptations' (10 September 1997), in *The Hindu*.

14. See Christopher Candland, 'Congress Decline and Party Pluralism in India', *Journal of International Affairs*, (New York: Summer 1997). Also see, Sheri Berman, 'The Life of the Party', *Comparative Politics* (October, 1997).

11 See Harish Khare, 'Beyond Kesri and Gowda', *The Hindu*, 13 April 1997. Also, Khare, 'Lessons from the Current Crisis', *The Hindu*, 9 April 1997. Also see Rajiv Shukla, 'Beyond Endurance', *Sunday*, 7 December 1997 for a glimpse into the difficulties in evolving a protocol of accommodation.

# The beginning of the end

VIR SANGHVI

IN party political terms, 1997 was the year of the Congress party. It was the Congress that brought two governments crashing down; the Congress that was portrayed as having forced an election on an unhappy country; and the Congress that went for the largest internal party election in recent memory to elect a 'truly representative leadership'.

It is, of course, entirely in keeping with the current state of the Congress that all of these achievements are essentially negative. When he withdrew support to the United Front government headed by H.D. Deve Gowda, Sitaram Kesri was pilloried by the country and called an 'old man in a hurry' by the outgoing prime minister. When he withdrew support a second time, the entire political establishment united against him and he ended up with an election he didn't want. And as for the party election, what should have been a great democratic experiment was as widely mocked as a Marcos-style poll whose chief objective was to legitimise Kesri's position.

Now, as India heads for an election that the Congress has prompted, the party seems unable to benefit from its actions. Nobody—not even Sitaram Kesri—believes that the Congress will

win this election. The best that the party can hope for is to be part of some new rag-tag coalition that will take office in the centre if the BJP doesn't make it.

Victory is unthinkable for a party that is bereft of charismatic leaders, empty of ideology, devoid of policies that appeal to its once loyal vote-banks, and uncertain about who calls the shots. Most of all, however, it is a party in the grip of dynasty that is nevertheless unsure whether a revival of the Nehru-Gandhi leadership will be the holy grail or a poisoned chalice.

Deep within its heart, the Congress still can't understand why it didn't get a majority in the 1991 election. Until the campaign began, everything was proceeding according to the script. Rajiv Gandhi refused to accept office in 1990 when the V.P. Singh government fell, even though it was clear that the Congress had the numbers, thanks to defections from the Janata Dal. Instead, Rajiv told interviewers that the Congress would not form a ministry without a mandate. It would rather support Chandra Shekhar.

Nobody within the Congress seriously doubted that Rajiv wanted to become prime minister again. But they knew the script. Like his mother

before him, Rajiv intended to give the new ministry a few months in office before forcing an election. And just as Indira Gandhi had been triumphantly swept back to power in 1979-80, they expected Rajiv to return to South Block.

**I**n 1979-80, the campaign had been predicated on a single theme: you gave this lot a chance and they let you down; put us back in and we'll give you stable government. It was an argument that worked best in the North (in any case, the Congress did reasonably in the South in both 1977 and 1989) where there was a two-horse race. If one lot failed, then the other lot was the obvious alternative.

Rajiv had been stunned by the Congress's reverses in the cow-belt in 1989. But he was certain that just as the voters had changed their mind between 1977 and 1980, they would do so again between 1989 and 1991. It was a certainty based on several miscalculations, one of which was fundamental. In 1977 and 1979-80, Indian politics may have been a two-horse race but now there was a new horse in the running. If voters were fed up of the Congress and Janata, they now had the option of the BJP.

There were other miscalculations. During Rajiv's term in office, the Congress lost its Muslim support-base. But when it was in opposition, it did nothing to win back this crucial vote-bank. On the other hand, the Janata Dal appeared to have sacrificed its government so that it could save the Babri Masjid. And despite V.P. Singh's unpopularity among the middle class, he had endeared himself to a powerful backward caste constituency by focusing on Mandal. More significant, he had unleashed social forces that continue to dominate cow-belt politics to this day.

Moreover, the Harijans, long and integral part of the Congress's

support base had begun to find their own leaders. The Congress ignored DS4 in U.P. when Rajiv was prime minister but was forced to come to terms with the organisation once it called itself the Bahujan Samaj Party. In 1991, Rajiv tried to buy over Kanshi Ram but the Congress made no significant attempt to try and halt the exodus of Dalits from its ranks.

And yet, everybody in the Congress believed that the party was headed for certain victory in 1991. In fact, as we now know, the Congress would not have improved on its 1989 performance had Rajiv not been assassinated. Even then, it failed to get an overall majority.

**T**he crisis of the Congress today stems from the same factors that led to failure in 1991. To those factors, the assassination added a new one. The Congress had no charismatic leadership: it was always the Nehrus and their followers. So, who was to succeed Rajiv?

When Sonia Gandhi turned down the job, the party chose Narasimha Rao, an old man in poor health (he had not contested the 1991 election because he wanted to retire to Andhra) on the assumption that he would be a transitional leader.

Narasimha Rao proved to be much smarter than the Congress had recognised and not only lasted the full five years but also purchased a majority for the party. But because he had no understanding of grassroot politics, he never addressed the issues that had led to the Congress's electoral decline. Such was his insecurity that he refused to let anyone else become Congress president while neglecting the organisation himself. Despite his undoubted shrewdness, he had certain angularities which further damaged the party's image with its votebanks. For one, he was very much the Brah-

min and liked to surround himself with other Brahmins, which did not go unnoticed by Harijans. For another, he was never very keen on Muslims, an image that stuck after the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

In late 1995, with elections only a few months away, Rao recognised that the Congress was heading for electoral defeat. The decline had not been stemmed – it had increased. His solution was as innovative as it was cynical. He was aware that there was a public uproar against corruption, much of it directed against his own government. He believed that if he could transform himself into a crusader against this corruption, he could engineer a wave of electoral popularity.

Accordingly, he used the Jain-hawala diary (which had been around for four years) against politicians from all parties. The innovativeness of the move lay in the fact that he acted against his own ministers including those, like V.C. Shukla, who were personally close to him. No prime minister had ever done that before and he was certain that the electorate would applaud his daring.

The irony is that the hawala failed in all respects – a few months later, the courts threw out the cases citing insufficient evidence. And far from helping Rao, the issue actually hurt the Congress electorally – it unleashed a wave of judicial and police activism whose greatest victim ended up being Narasimha Rao himself.

**B**ut Rao had one last gift for the Congress. In 1996, after the BJP failed to win the motion of confidence, the Congress should have led the coalition that formed the next government – after all, the coalition could not have survived without the Congress and the party was its single largest constituent.

But all the constituents of the United Front made it clear that they would not serve under Narasimha Rao as prime minister – after all, nobody ‘may’ have won the general election but Rao had clearly ‘lost’ it. Considering that the objection was to Rao as an individual and not to the Congress as an entity, the logical consequence would have been for Rao to resign and let a more acceptable leader take over. But not only did Rao refuse to quit as Congress president and CPP leader, the party did not have the guts to throw him out. Instead, it re-elected him unanimously.

That added yet another factor to the decline of the Congress: it came to occupy a strange nowhere land with regard to the government. It was not in opposition so it couldn’t attack its decisions beyond a point. And yet, it was not in government either, so it had no power or clout. Effectively, the Congress was in a situation where it shared the blame for whatever the government did. And yet, it got none of the credit for its more popular actions.

**C**ontrary to the general view, the Congress can handle being in opposition. It has managed to offer a credible challenge to non-Congress governments in such states as Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. And it did all right at the centre in 1978 (after Indira Gandhi split the party) and in 1990 (when it went for V.P. Singh).

The problem was not simply – as the same observers have said – that the Congress wanted power. It was that having placed it in a situation where it was neither in government or in opposition, the United Front went about seeking to destroy it.

Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda and some of his colleagues recognised that much of India was moving to a BJP vs The Rest situation.

There was less and less room for centrist parties in this scenario. The Congress was already in decline. So why not hasten the process and leave the field clear for the Janata Dal and its friends.

Narasimha Rao had provided Deve Gowda with the ideal weapon to finish off the Congress. The CBI and the judiciary were eager to target politicians. The public enjoyed the spectacle of former prime ministers being led away in handcuffs. And though the credit for the action went to judges and politicians, no blame seemed to attach itself to the United Front government even when the victims screamed ‘vendetta’.

**T**he many cases filed against Narasimha Rao were the first step. But then, Deve Gowda began targeting the rest of the Congress. An investigation was ordered into party funds. The Mescos group whose chairperson had been a Congress candidate in the 1996 election, was raided and prosecuted for technical violations in the manner in which it made contributions (by cheque) to the Congress.

Next, criminal prosecutions were planned against Congress leaders. The CBI raked up an old case relating to a murder of a Delhi doctor and attempted to implicate Kesri himself in the death. The civil aviation ministry referred Air India’s wet-lease aircraft to the CBI which promptly prepared to prosecute former civil aviation minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad. And so on.

As the pressure mounted, Congressmen turned on an increasingly worried Kesri. What was the point supporting a government that was determined to send them to jail, they asked. Kesri sent emissaries to Deve Gowda who argued, rather as Narasimha Rao had done in the hawala, that the CBI was autonomous.

This was a laughable response as the new CBI director, Joginder Singh was previously an obscure Karnataka policeman who Deve Gowda and the CPM’s Harkishan Singh Surjeet had foisted on the CBI. Nor could it be said that Deve Gowda was moved by piousness. Nothing in his record suggests that he is particularly intolerant of corruption.

Finally, just as the CBI prepared to tell the court that it was investigating Kesri in the murder of the Delhi doctor, the Congress acted. It unilaterally withdrew support to Deve Gowda and staked its own claim to form the government. In the process, it gave the impression that what had been a decision provoked by desperation was in fact part of a carefully worked out plan to seize power. This was a huge mistake because Deve Gowda was now able to claim that he was being pushed out only because Kesri wanted to be prime minister.

The following week must have been the most humiliating in Kesri’s life. He was pilloried by the media, told to get lost by every constituent of the United Front when he asked for support, and finally, abused in Parliament. Even when he eventually got what he had wanted all along – a new prime minister of his own choosing – it seemed like a defeat. The Congress had emerged as the new irresponsible untouchable of Indian politics.

**M**ore than the first crisis caused by the withdrawal of support, it is the second crisis, in December 1997, that showed up the weakness of the Congress. The first time around Kesri may have acted out of desperation, but he had at least acted of his own volition. The second crisis demonstrated that despite the massive support he received in the organisational elections. Kesri does not control the party. He did not want to withdraw support to

the Gujral government, yet such is the structure of the Congress that he was left with no choice.

Kesri believes that Arjun Singh leaked the Jain Commission report to the media. The report suggested that the DMK was involved with Rajiv Gandhi's assassins. In the circumstances, could the Congress continue to support a government that included the DMK? Singh's interest in all this was obvious. He had lost the last Lok Sabha election and had no interest in letting the 11th Lok Sabha continue. He had also been sidelined by Kesri and believed that Kesri and Prime Minister Inder Gujral were running the government for their own benefit to the detriment of the Congress. All he needed was an issue on which to break-up the UF-Congress relationship.

**T**he Jain Commission report was the perfect issue because no compromise was possible until the DMK left the government. Moreover, by recalling the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, Singh would open the door for the dynasty. As a self-confessed Sonia Gandhi loyalist, Singh hoped to score brownie points with I Janpath. The Sonia Gandhi factor would also scare Kesri. While he might disregard any other issue, he had no room for manoeuvre when it came to the dynasty; he would have to threaten to withdraw support if the DMK did not leave the government.

There was yet another bonus. If the Congress did withdraw support and an election resulted, then Sonia would feel duty-bound to campaign. After all, the election was caused because of the party's strong feelings about her husband's assassination. If she campaigned, then the Congress would benefit and so would Arjun Singh, as her chief lieutenant. This argument also appealed to Jitendra

Prasada, another leader who had been sidelined by Kesri. He threw his weight behind Singh's demand.

Sonia Gandhi's role in all this is not clear. The press believes that she prompted Arjun Singh. Her friends say that he acted on his own and that she resented being manipulated. In any case, they say, it is not certain that she will campaign now that an election has resulted.

**B**ut regardless of whether Sonia and Singh were acting in concert, what the episode proved is this: when it comes to the dynasty, the Congress has no choice. Kesri didn't want an election. Much of the working committee did not want an election. Virtually no Lok Sabha MP wanted an election. And if Sonia's friends are right, then she didn't want one either.

And yet, an election has resulted simply because interested parties were able to manipulate the Nehru-Gandhi factor in such a manner that the entire leadership of the Congress felt obliged to bring down the government and put its future on the line.

What does this say about the Congress? It is one thing to be led by a dynastic leader; quite another to be manipulated by the perceived sentiments of the dynasty, especially when no such sentiments have ever been publicly expressed.

Worse still, the episode suggests that there is nobody in the Congress with the guts to ask Sonia Gandhi a direct question. If Kesri believed that Arjun Singh was acting against the party's interests, then the obvious thing would have been for him to go and see Sonia and ask if she wanted him to withdraw support. It is bad enough that support would have been withdrawn merely because Sonia wanted it. But in this case it was withdrawn because people thought that Sonia 'might' want it. Nobody asked

her a direct question and she remained enigmatic till the end.

As it rushes into an election that it never wanted, the Congress is pinning its hopes on Sonia Gandhi. Because it has no policies with which to attract support and no charismatic leader to lead its campaign, it hopes that Sonia will plead for revenge for her husband's assassination.

Congressmen say that even if she doesn't take over the party and even if she doesn't expressly ask people to vote for the Congress, it will be enough as long as she plays the grieving widow and reminds people that her husband laid down his life for the country.

Obviously, such an approach to politics is cynical beyond belief and demonstrates the depths to which the Congress has sunk. But in purely political terms, it suffers from another drawback: it might not work.

**D**oes the dynasty still count for much? If all that the Congress needs is a Nehru-Gandhi at its head, then why did Rajiv Gandhi lose the 1989 election? Why would he have lost the 1991 election? And do people still care that Rajiv was assassinated and that the DMK may have offered shelter to some of his killers?

If the answer to that is 'it might work; it might not', then consider the flip side. The Jain Commission issue targets the United Front because it suggests that it is shielding the DMK. But it has nothing to do with the Congress's real opposition in the North: the BJP. On the other hand, a Sonia-led campaign might actually work to the BJP's benefit. It would once again portray itself as the party of national pride while the Congress would be accused of selling out to foreigners: Ram Rajya vs Rome Rajya.

Even from Sonia Gandhi's perspective, it is hard to see how it is

in her interest to stand. At present she enjoys a special status in the Congress because people believe that she counts for something. But when that belief is put to the test, she is certain to lose.

Even if Sonia campaigns nobody believes that the Congress can get an overall majority. Her greatest supporters say that she may help push the total from 140 seats to 180. That's the best case scenario and even if that comes to pass, all she'll have proved is that the famous Gandhi dynasty is now worth no more than 40 seats. How could this possibly be in her interest?

But what if it doesn't work? What if Rome Rajya becomes an embarrassment? If that comes to pass then she will, at a single stroke, have destroyed the image built up by three generations of her family. Is that a risk worth taking?

No doubt Sonia is aware of these calculations. That could be one reason why she is said to be unhappy about the election. And in all fairness to her, it must be said that she has repeatedly told friends that she is not in politics and that even if her intervention gets the Congress an overall majority, she doesn't want to be prime minister. She doesn't see what she would gain by taking the job. And she does see what she could lose.

**K**esri has now tried to put a happy face on events. He believes that the failures of two successive governments have finished off the United Front. He reckons that the election will throw up a hung parliament. The BJP will find it difficult, once again to find the allies required for a majority. It will be left to the centrist parties to form the government. And this time around the Congress will not support the ministry from outside. It will form a Congress-led coalition.

Indian politics is notoriously difficult to predict, so this scenario could come to pass. But there are other scenarios that are as plausible. After the Congress broke up in U.P. nobody believes that the BJP is untouchable any longer. It is possible that various United Front constituents will refuse to align with it. But it is as likely that a third of the Congress will break away to support a BJP government. In December 1997, when the BJP tried to break the Congress it managed 25 MPs, short of the one-third required for a split. But in a post-election scenario, that could change.

**M**ore worrying for the Congress is that even as the BJP was enticing its members, a sizeable chunk of the Congress led by Sharad Pawar was negotiating with the United Front. If Pawar could have brought 70 MPs with him, the United Front was ready to make him prime minister. In the event, Pawar failed to get the numbers required for a parliamentary majority.

Kesri, who was aware of all this, is now threatening to deny party tickets to Pawar's supporters and to others who are likely to cross the floor. Should he go ahead and do so, then it is almost certain that Pawar will start a regional party. The same is true in Bihar where Jagannath Mishra has threatened to start his own party. The result may be that the Congress ends up looking like a mirror image of the United Front: a loose confederacy of regional leaders who have nothing in common except for a desire to take office.

Should that come to pass, it will mean the end of the Congress as we have known it. And yet, would that surprise anyone? How long can a party get by without any ideology, without any support base, without any charismatic leadership and indeed, without any direction?

# Dark side of the moon

RUDRANGSHU MUKHERJEE

THERE is a joke doing the rounds in Calcutta. Jyoti Basu was given a special mobile phone by Bill Clinton. On this phone Basu could talk to anyone anywhere in the universe. Basu, to try out the instrument from the White House, rang his old comrade Promode Das Gupta in heaven. There was no comrade Promode Das Gupta registered in heaven. So Basu tried hell and spoke to his old comrade for a couple of minutes. He was aghast when the bill came to a million dollars. But Clinton saved him and picked up the tab.

Back home in Calcutta Basu was showing off his new phone in the party headquarters in Alimuddin Street and told Dasgupta's hand-picked boys – Biman Bose, Anil Biswas and Buddhadev Bhattacharya – about his conversation with their old mentor. The trio was very excited and wanted to speak to their guru immediately. Basu warned them about the cost.

They called hell nonetheless and spoke for about an hour. Much to Basu's surprise the cost came to less than 50 cents. On checking back, Basu discovered that this was the charge for a local call. The trio had merely called hell from hell.

The speed at which the story is circulating is an indication of how the Left Front's performance is perceived after 20 years. The response to the jibe from advocates of the Left Front is also a give away. They say things in West Bengal are much better than the state of things in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. This cannot even be described as a back-handed compliment. The very fact that West Bengal has to be compared to India's lawless states is bad enough.

One reason why a story like the one above circulates among the Bengali literati is the performance of the Left Front in the sphere of industrial development. This has a long his-



tory. The left first tasted political power in West Bengal in 1967. There was an enormous amount of popular support and enthusiasm for the first non-Congress government. Nobody doubted the fact that the decisive presence in the United Front in West Bengal in the 1960s was that of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Heady with power, they were in no mood to brook any compromises with business and industry. Trade unions became militant and this resulted in the notorious *gherao* movement which closed down many industries and business houses.

**T**here was also an escalation of violence in the state. This was a fall-out of the Naxalite movement which preached and practised the doctrine of armed revolution and terrorism. The cult of the bomb and the pipe gun affected the entire climate and atmosphere in West Bengal. The inevitable consequence of *gherao* and the instability which accompanies violence was a flight of capital from the state. From that flight the state has still to recover.

The next round of left electoral victories came in 1977 when the CPI(M) led Left Front reaped the harvest of its consistent opposition to Indira Gandhi and the Emergency. This victory, unlike the ones in the late sixties, has proved to be more permanent. After 1977, the CPI(M) has forgotten what it means to lose in elections. But its 20 year long tenure in power did not bring about any major changes in the investment climate of the state. The Left Front, at least upto 1994, made no attempt to woo capital and persisted in its anti-capitalist rhetoric.

On the labour front, there were no major strikes and actions but the trade unions continued to erode whatever little work ethic was left in the

state. To maximize material gains for its members without inculcating in them the responsibility of work became the hallmark of the trade union movement. Workers remembered that they had wages to collect but forgot they have a duty to perform. The absence of strikes was part of a deliberate strategy to project the image of a docile labour force and a stable and peaceful state.

The reality was even harsher. Any attempt to set up a production unit of any size meant encountering the muscle power of the local party cadres who demanded jobs for the boys. There was also the mindless obstructionism of bureaucracy, the party and officials. This transformed West Bengal into an industrial wasteland. The Marxists were not unaware of the steady decline as a convenient stick to wield against the central government. West Bengal's economic decline was a direct product, the left argued, of the centre's discrimination.

**W**hile the West Bengal communists fought their mock battle against New Delhi, the currents of world history turned against the established communist regimes. Like ninepins, the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe collapsed. Millions of people, weary of starvation and a diet of lies, reacted against inhuman oppression and threw the so called dictatorship of the proletariat into the dustbin of history. Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* transformed the political face of a large part of Europe. The tremors of this collapse were inevitably felt in all communist parties across the globe. Some changed their names and many changed their agenda.

But the tides of history did not succeed in shaking the complacency of the CPI(M). It stuck steadfast to its true Stalinist colours. Its programme and its rhetoric remained undisturbed

by any distant cannonade from the streets of Moscow. Within India, the party launched itself into a crusade against the policies of liberalization and globalization which had been initiated by the then prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and his finance minister Manmohan Singh.

**F**rom the middle of 1994 there was one voice which was heard over the cacophony which the CPI(M) raised against the new economic policies. This was the voice of the chief minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu. A veteran communist, his discomfort about his party's opposition to liberalization and the dismantling of the socialist structure had no ideological moorings. His unhappiness grew out of his concern about the verdict of history on his chief ministership. His ambition had always been to go down in history as West Bengal's most successful chief minister. Instead, by faithfully toeing the party line, he was running the risk of going down in the history books as the chief minister who left behind an industrial desert in the state over which he ruled.

Basu's ego dictated that a change was required. In his speeches and public pronouncements from the second half of 1994, he made it clear that he wanted to bring back capital to the state. He invited foreign companies to invest in West Bengal and promised them co-operation. He sounded a warning to trade unions by announcing that unnecessary strikes and cease-works would not be tolerated. If necessary such agitations would be broken with the help of the police. To make his intentions clear Basu refurbished the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation and appointed Somnath Chatterjee as its chairman.

This appointment was by itself significant. Chatterjee is well known as a communist parliamentarian but he

is not known, to enjoy any special importance in the party hierarchy. By choosing him, Basu was obviously indicating that he wanted somebody from outside the party apparatus, somebody who would be more flexible and amenable to change. He wanted to be rid of the party mindset, to be free of the official straitjacket.

Under the changed circumstances and because of some heroic wooing of international capital by Chatterjee, by the end of 1994 a staggering sum of Rs100 billion was promised for industrial development in West Bengal. Subsequently, even more sums were promised. But the euphoria seems to be dying down. Promises are not materializing into actual investments.

**T**he reasons for this are not far to seek. Economic development, by definition, cannot be a one man enterprise. Basu discovered that his path was not as smooth as he had thought it would be. The CPI(M) which had been nurtured on anti-capitalism found it impossible to forfeit its old vocabulary. Looking at industrialists as friends rather than as class enemies proved to be impossible. Basu failed in as simple a thing as privatizing the Great Eastern Hotel, a state-run loss making enterprise which a French conglomerate wanted to buy, because he could not get the unions to agree. Work culture, once killed by communist trade unions, refused to be resurrected.

In a very real and tangible way, in his attempts to inaugurate an industrial renaissance in West Bengal, Jyoti Basu was fighting his own past. His failure can only bring to mind the following lines of a German radical, long forgotten and much abused by his friends and foes alike: Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make

it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living.

**I**f CPI(M)'s past refuses to unshackle West Bengal's economic future, in another vital arena the CPI(M) has killed West Bengal's past to ensure its own presence. This is the arena of culture.

From the forties, the predominant cultural idiom of the Bengali intelligentsia has been left and radical. The intelligentsia, as one commentator noted, saw itself as an active agent of transformation, standing outside the systems of privilege and exploitation through which rich businessmen extracted huge profits while workers were left without subsistence, or landlords and rich peasants hoarded large stocks of grain while small peasants and sharecroppers sank deeper into debt.

Cultural creation increasingly became an activity of self-questioning; the more the intelligentsia asked itself what its role was to be, the more political the answers became. Dissent, self-questioning and a heightened social and political consciousness informed the world of education and culture. This was noticeable in universities, in creative writing, in the plays put up by theatre groups outside the commercial stage, and in films produced by directors who did not conform to the Tollywood formula. It was evident even in street graffiti. More often than not, the influence of the then undivided Communist Party of India was crucial in the making of this tradition.

The first muffling of this tradition of dissent came in the early seventies, first under Siddhartha Shankar Ray and then under the Emergency.

Formal affiliation or sympathy with either the CPI(M) or the CPI(ML) posed a danger to life. Under severe state repression thousands of political activists were shot by the police and by hired hoodlums. When the left came to power in 1977, there was the natural expectation that this tradition would be carried forward. But this did not happen. The principle reason for this was the Left Front's quest – and in this respect as in all other spheres, the CPI(M) was the driving force – to acquire complete control on all matters relating to education and culture.

**A**s an organized and cadre-based party, the CPI(M) went about the matter with great method and discipline. Using the strength of its organization and the power of governance, it reached a position where nobody could be appointed to any post unless he was a party loyalist. On one memorable occasion when a non-CPI(M) candidate got himself appointed vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, through a quirk of the complicated electoral system and with some help from the chancellor, the party used its muscle power to bring the university to a standstill for five years.

Another victim of the left's short-sighted policy was Calcutta's premier undergraduate institution, Presidency College. Under the guise of greater democratization, the left decided to ignore the special status Presidency College had enjoyed among the government colleges. It decided that Presidency should be treated at par with the other government colleges. The immediate consequence was an indiscriminate transfer of teachers from Presidency to the mofussil colleges and from the mofussil to Presidency.

Many of the best teachers of the college left government service and sought employment elsewhere. Oth-

ers who had never taught a small honours class or had never known the tutorial system came to teach in Presidency. The fallout was an immediate decline in standards. Another long term result of this policy was the decline of the college library, which at one time was one of the best in the city. Because the CPI(M) refused to recognize the special status of Presidency, it refused to take seriously the demand and the recommendations of the University Grants Commission that the college be made autonomous and be given deemed university status.

Once this control was in place, the CPI(M) suddenly had no dearth of supporters. Teachers who had served for years in the mofussil and were eager to come to Calcutta or keen to get university appointments, overnight became party sympathizers. Loyalty prevailed over merit in transfers and appointments. There were some remarkable cases where persons with no left affiliations were appointed to high posts because they cultivated the right persons and made the right ideological noises.

Another example of the same trend is seen in the theatre movement which was once vibrant and an important part of Calcutta's cultural life. Through a judicious disbursement of state patronage in which loyalty counted for everything, the theatre movement has been reduced to a position of dependence. This is reflected in the choice of themes and the complete absence of experimentation.

Under twenty years of left rule, dissent in culture has not been at a premium. In fact, the culture of dissent has been stilled. In human beings, twenty is the age of youth and rebellion. In politics, it represents a comfortable and cosy middle age. In the words of the poet Samar Sen, the love of young men has become the lust of old age.

## Ambedkar and the Dalits

NALINI PANDIT

IN the movement for emancipation from the shackles of the caste system in the first half of the 20th century the Dalits chose B.R. Ambedkar as their leader. Ambedkar is iconised today, his statues erected in Dalit settlements, his name associated with many institutions and any perceived dishonour to him is likely to lead to violence. However, 40 years after his death it would be worthwhile to trace the path Ambedkar set out on, the progress which the Dalits have made and the obstacles, internal and external, they face.

After graduating from the University of Bombay in 1913, Ambedkar, with the help of a scholarship from the ruler of Baroda State, went to Colum-

bia University in the USA for higher education. He stayed there for four years and obtained an M.A. and Ph.D. in Economics. John Dewey was a professor at the university and is remembered, after Jefferson, as a philosopher who contributed to the development of democratic thought. Jefferson believed that God gave certain natural rights to all human beings and political democracy was necessary for enjoying these rights. If man were free of the fetters put on him by tradition, freedom in various fields would naturally follow – science, culture, art and industry. Man is ultimately responsible to God for his actions. Believing that restrictions imposed by society diminish the fundamental freedom of the individual, Jefferson sought to minimise government interference.

**D**ewey did not agree with the proposition that there is a basic contradiction between the individual and society. If man is to enjoy real freedom, it is necessary to consider the social conditions conducive to the perpetuation of such freedom. Democracy is not merely a form of political system, it is a way of life. It is expressed through the feelings which people have for each other and its success is measured by the effect it has on their lives. Naturally, those who believe in freedom and democracy must reflect on the nature of the social system.

Dewey believed that man is a moral animal. The relationship of men to each other has both a social and moral side.<sup>1</sup> During his stay in the US, Ambedkar was deeply impressed by Dewey's philosophy. He accepted the liberal values of liberty, equality, fraternity, rationality and democracy and

spent his life in giving a social democratic basis to the political democracy which was slowly taking shape in India in the 30 years after the First World War.

**O**n returning to India in 1923 after finally completing his education in the US and then in UK, Ambedkar established the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, a society for the welfare of the untouchables. Satyagrahas for the right to use water at a public tank in Mahad in Colaba district and over the right to enter temples at different places in Maharashtra were organised but these were not successful. So after the Round Table Conference held in the UK by the British government he withdrew these agitations and concentrated his efforts on securing certain political and economic rights for the Dalits.

In the political sphere, Ambedkar worked at two levels. In 1917, Montagu, the Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet, had made a statement in Parliament that the goal of the British government was the establishment of a responsible government in India in a gradual and peaceful manner. Ambedkar used this statement to press for certain special rights for the Dalits in a future constitution for India. He did not participate in the national movement under Gandhi's leadership, but tried with the help of the British to pressurise the Congress to achieve his objectives. For this reason Arun Shourie has, in a recent book, accused him being a stooge of British imperialists.

Shourie's judgement shows an ignorance of the condition of the Dalits. The untouchables, though Hindu by religion, were not allowed to enter temples or listen to the scriptures. They had no right to education. It was not only their touch but even their shadow which was considered

polluting. They were forced to reside outside village boundaries and follow the meanest of occupations. Untouchability through sanction of religious scriptures left no outlet available to them to improve their position in society.

The Mahars to whom Ambedkar belonged were in a desperate position as they had no occupation of their own. The Mahar was the lowest grade government servant in the village in medieval times. He assisted the headman in collecting government revenue and acted as a watchman for the village. Other men of the caste worked as agricultural labourers in certain seasons for extremely low wages. The East India Company provided them an opportunity by recruiting them in their army. Some rose to become lower grade officers. Education was made compulsory for children in military colonies and Ambedkar's father was a school teacher in one such colony. While the British opened their schools to students of all communities, they did not legally abolish untouchability as it was sanctioned by religion. However, they established a system which was based on freedom of occupation, of exchange and contract.

**U**nder British rule a new English educated middle class emerged in the country which imbibed the ideas of individual freedom, nationalism and democracy. Yet, as most of them were from the higher castes, they were unwilling to accept the idea of equality and welcome untouchables in their midst. Even Tilak, the most respected leader of the Indian National Congress before Gandhi, was opposed to social reform on grounds that it would divide the people and disrupt the national movement. Gandhi accepted the removal of untouchability as part of his constructive programme, but Congress workers were not enthusiastic

about it. Therefore, we cannot blame Dalit leaders if they feared that a transfer of power from British to Indian hands would lead to a revival of the hated *chaturvarna* system.

Ambedkar's strategy was to force the Congress to agree to a communal settlement before the transfer of power. 'A question is asked,' says Ambedkar, 'as to why a communal settlement is necessary for a political settlement. The answer to the question is to be found in the wrong social system, which is undemocratic, far overweighted in favour of the classes and against the masses, too class conscious and too communal minded. Political democracy will become a complete travesty if it were built upon this foundation.'<sup>2</sup> So he endeavoured to find a solution to the communal deadlock which had arisen due to differences over the nature of the future constitution of India between representatives of the Congress on the one hand and Muslims, Dalits and other minorities on the other.

**A**s the process of political reform gained momentum, Ambedkar felt the need for a party which would be an alternative to the Congress. The Constitutional Law of 1935 had given reserved seats to the Dalits both in the provincial and central assemblies. Ambedkar knew that it would not be possible for the candidate of a Dalit party to get elected on a reserved seat with only Dalit votes. So with the help of his friends in the Social Service League, he established the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

Eighteen candidates of this party, including Ambedkar, were elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1937, 13 of whom were on reserved seats and 5 on general

seats. Ambedkar put forward two new bills in the Assembly, one for the abolition of the Mahar Watan which bound the Mahar to the village on meagre wages and the other, for the abolition of the Khoti system (zamindari) in the Kokan region. His party being in a minority in the Assembly, both the bills had to be withdrawn.

The ILP was also interested in the problems of industrial labour. When the Congress government in Bombay brought forward a bill placing restrictions on trade unions and making arbitration compulsory in industrial disputes, Ambedkar criticised the bill in the Assembly and asked his followers to join the general strike organised by the communists to oppose it.

**A**mbedkar looked upon the Second World War as one between democratic and fascist forces and willingly accepted the offer of a seat in the Viceroy's executive council. As negotiations for the transfer of power started, he felt the need for a party of the Dalits to protect their interests in these negotiations. So in July 1942 when Stafford Cripps came to India for discussions with Indian leaders, he disbanded the ILP and established the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF). The SCF contested elections to the provincial assemblies held in 1946 but no candidate was elected. The results of the elections held in 1952 for selecting members to the first Parliament under the Constitution of independent India were no different. Defeat in these elections convinced Ambedkar of the necessity of forming a broad-based political party. However, before such a party could come into existence, death overpowered him in 1956.

In September 1943, Ambedkar, then a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, was invited by the Indian Federation of Labour to deliver

a lecture at the all India workers study camp held at Delhi. He pointed to the weaknesses of parliamentary democracy and urged the labourers to form a party of their own and capture political power. According to Ambedkar the two main defects in the ideology of democracy were the sanctity of contract, which gave the strong an opportunity to defraud the weak and a failure to realise that political democracy cannot succeed without social and economic democracy. As a result society is divided into two classes – the rulers and the ruled and the government is in reality a government of a hereditary subject class by a hereditary ruling class.

Ambedkar held the labouring classes responsible for this. The labouring classes, he said, have failed to acquaint themselves with literature dealing with the government of mankind such as Rousseau's Social Contract, Marx's Communist Manifesto, Pope Leo XIII's Encyclicals on the conditions of labour and J.S. Mill's On Liberty.

**A**nother fault of the labouring classes, he argued, was that they lacked ambition to capture government as a necessary means of safeguarding their interests. They formed only trade unions. The control of government must be a target for labour to strive for. An objective of the trade union movement should be to abolish the present system in which they are made to work as slaves on meagre wages and to establish a new social system which in a real sense will be organised on the basis of liberty, equality and fraternity. This would require a basic social transformation.

Political power, he said, was a powerful tool to bring about such a basic transformation of society. He advised the workers, therefore, to form a political party of their own and

2. B.R. Ambedkar, *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah: Writings and Speeches*, Vol 1, p. 224 Government of Maharashtra.

work for this transformation.<sup>3</sup> The type of transformation Ambedkar had in mind is clear from a memorandum which he submitted to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the SCF. In this memorandum he recommended that the nationalisation of basic industries, nationalisation of agricultural land and leasing it to cooperatives of farmers, irrespective of caste and religion, and compulsory insurance of all adult citizens should be made a part of the Constitution of India.<sup>4</sup>

The party which he had in mind was to be formed on the basis of the unity of labourers and Dalits. The Dalits, he said, had now come to understand the injustice which the Hindu social system had imposed on them for hundreds of years. So they were expected to move politics in the right direction. Since they had reserved seats in the legislative assembly, a labour party could benefit from them as the ILP did in the past.<sup>5</sup>

**A**fter Ambedkar's death his followers established the Republican Party of India. But it did not become a party to be reckoned with. The Dalits in Hindu society had to fight not only class oppression but also caste oppression. In 1936, Ambedkar had reached the conclusion that a struggle against caste would not succeed within the Hindu fold. So he decided on conversions as a strategy. After considering different faiths he concluded that Buddhism was more consistent with modern science, humanist moral values and the cultural ethos of this country. Naturally, after his resignation from the Nehru cabinet, he devoted time to studying Buddhism and became a

convert in October 1956 along with a large number of his followers.

As Ambedkar died within two months of conversion, he had no time to think in any detail about the ideology or the organisational structure of the new party. His leftist friends in the ILP had no place in the SCF. So they joined other left parties. The post Independence generation of educated Dalits had not yet reached an intellectual level where they could formulate an ideology of their own. Naturally, an ideological vacuum was created in the new RPI.

**M**oreover, within a few days of his conversion, Ambedkar delivered a speech on Buddha and Karl Marx at the World Buddhist Conference held in Nepal. Both Buddha and Marx, he said, opposed exploitation and recommended public ownership. The only difference between the two was that Marx advised violence for achieving the ends while Buddha preached non-violence.<sup>6</sup> This speech, which cannot be defended on scholastic grounds, created ideological confusion in the movement with certain groups espousing Marxism and others Buddhism. It also led to splits within the RPI.

Ambedkar was essentially an intellectual, not an organiser. He was unable to establish a strong organisation in his own lifetime to fight for the rights of the Dalits. Though organisations such as the SCF were formally created, they primarily worked as instruments for mobilising people for mass demonstrations. But after demonstrating people dispersed and nothing remained. One cause of this organisational weakness was the suspension of satyagrahas for obtaining civil rights. In a satyagraha, those who participated risked a cane charge, flogging, imprisonment and confiscation of property by the government. It tested

the devotion, endurance and courage of the participants and helped the formation of an organisational corps. The suspension of satyagraha meant that such a spirit could not be inculcated in the movement.

**A**mbedkar fought for the rights of all scheduled castes in India. However, the base of his movement remained confined to Maharashtra, spreading to only a few other SCs in India such as the Chamars in U.P. This was because in most provinces of the North the SCs were more or less treated as serfs. In Maharashtra, the Dalits belonged mainly to three castes — Mahars, Chormakars and the Mangs. The Mahars were the first to migrate from the village and entered the army. They were also the first proletarians and hence became conscious of their political and economic rights. The Chormakars and Mangs on the other hand, even after migration to the towns, continued with their traditional occupations or worked in the unorganised sector.

After the principle of reservation in government jobs was accepted, the Mahars being more educated managed government jobs easily while the others could not compete with them. This created a rift between Mahars and the others. In 1935, when Ambedkar publicly declared his intention to convert, the Chamars feared that if they changed their religion, caste Hindus might boycott them. At this time Ambedkar organised a separate conference of Mahars to elicit their support for conversion. However, no similar effort was made to convince the Chamars and the Mangs about the desirability of conversion. So the movement for conversion remained confined to the Mahars.

Today, the Dalit community is divided into a small, educated middle class which has risen as a result of res-

3. B.R. Ambedkar, *Labour and Parliamentary Democracy: Writings and Speeches*, Vol 10, p.106-110.

4. B.R. Ambedkar, op. cit., Vol 1, p.396-397.

5. B.R. Ambedkar, *Labour and Parliamentary Democracy*, op.cit., Vol 10, p.110.

6. B.R. Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx: Writings and Speeches*, Vol 3, p. 444.

ervations, and a large class of poor agricultural labourers, small farmers and workers in the unorganised sector. The movement is dominated by the middle class and rarely goes beyond reservations. The redistribution of land and security to agricultural labour is not part of their agenda. After Ambedkar, Dadasaheb Gaikwad – his trusted lieutenant and an experienced worker – organised satyagrahas on the demand that fallow lands with the government be distributed to the landless. He succeeded only to a limited extent. But the 'Reformed RPI', i.e. the middle class group, did not support him. After his death the Dalits and some small leftist groups in Marathwada attempted to persuade the state to legalise the occupation of village grazing lands which were brought under cultivation by poor Dalits of the locality. The demand was partially accepted by the state, but this occupation of grazing lands created tension in the villages and led to atrocities on the Dalits.

**T**he basic cause of the weakness of the RPI can be traced to the left parties. Being a minority, the Dalits needed the support of some non-Dalit groups to get their candidates elected to the legislative assemblies or Parliament. With whom to form an alliance, has always been a cause of splits within the party. Second, when a relatively powerful leader does emerge, the ruling party such as the Congress tries to co-opt him into its power structure and neutralise the movement. Today, the different groups in the RPI do come together over questions related to Ambedkar, such as the renaming of the Marathwada University, the Riddles of Hinduism or the desecration of Ambedkar statues. But this cooperation does not last long: once the problem is over, they revert to their separate existence.

The failure of the RPI is in a way the failure of all progressive forces. The Dalits who live in villages and in urban slums are the real proletariat in the Marxian sense, i.e. those who have nothing to lose but their chains and a world to win. They suffer from both caste and class exploitation. The left assumed that caste was a part of the superstructure and would disappear with the growth of capitalism. This did not happen. Caste as a social system has broken down and the Indian Constitution has given every citizen freedom of education, freedom of occupation and the right to vote. But untouchability still continues in our villages. The food, clothing, language and behaviour of each individual depends on his caste, and most people marry within their community even today.

**N**aturally, it has also influenced our political system. Each party is based on a particular caste cluster: Even the left, though indifferent to the problems created by the caste system, has not completely absolved itself from this system. It has failed to provide a praxis that the socially depressed population needs. It continues to be dominated by upper caste leaders who, though sincere and selfless, cannot consciously overcome their caste in both style and intellectual orientation. Ambedkar envisaged a party of the Dalits and the labourers to fight against their two enemies, Brahmanism and capitalism. In the present circumstances such a party would have not only to shape the new consciousness among the hitherto oppressed groups such as the Dalits and the lower OBCs for social equality and political power, but simultaneously struggle against imperialist designs and fascist forces. In the current political situation that prevails in India today such a party remains a distant dream.

# Kashmir: getting real

BHARAT KARNAD

WITH the Cold War research gravy-train reaching a terminus, American think-tanks and the academia are frantically searching around for another long-haul vehicle. Until such time as something else is found Kashmir, apparently, will do. For starters, the militancy there had — note the past tense — shades of Bosnia and of the Palestinian *intifada* on the West Bank. Then there is the assiduously nursed myth about Kashmir as a 'flash point' for nuclearised conflict in the subcontinent.

And, to top it all is the western hostages issue which makes it perennially topical. What with the hostages' family members making periodic, futile, rounds in the Valley and the possibility of the next body suddenly turning up somewhere, prompting the CNN to rush in with camera crews, the Kashmir issue is always an incident away from getting back into the glare of international publicity.

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*1947-1997, The Kashmir Dispute at Fifty: Charting Paths to Peace, Report on the Visit of an Independent Study Team to India and Pakistan.* Kashmir Study Group, Larchmont, New York, 1997.

*The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* by Sumit Ganguly. Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press (Foundation Books, New Delhi), 1997.

*Wars and No Peace Over Kashmir* by Maroof Raza. Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 1996.

*The Peacekeepers of Kashmir: The UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan* by Pauline Dawson. Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1995.

That Kashmir is at all rivetting to an American audience on the other side of the globe is because it encompasses some of the more intellectually fashionable concerns presently agitating the attentive public in the United States — N-war, Islam, terrorism, cultural and civilizational clashes, human rights (HR), ethnic nationalism, and Third World strife. They may not understand the issues very well, but damned if they don't want their government to have a say in the matter!

The American public's anxieties translate directly into governmental interest which leads to oodles of private and taxpayer's money pouring into related research. These funds keep the innumerable think-tanks and professional analysts busy, and in business. Combine this with Washington's long standing desire for an activist role in South Asia, and one can see why many policy wonks and wannabees in American universities and elsewhere are spewing forth, when not novel then banal and politically impractical, solutions for the Kashmir problem.

The Report by the US-based Kashmir Study Group, financed by M. Farooq Kathwari, a Kashmiri (whether originally from the Indian or the Pakistan side of the Line of Control is nowhere indicated), is the latest such work produced by a team of American South Asia experts, most of them well-known and well-regarded.



Kathwari is Chairman of the Board of Ethan Allen Inc., a New York financial consulting firm of repute. (The other prestigious report, *A New Policy Toward India and Pakistan: Report of an Independent Task Force*, was released in early 1997 by the Council on Foreign Relations. An Asia Society Report on The United States, Japan and South Asia: Cooperation on Nuclear Challenges will soon be out. It reworks the by now stale scenario of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan triggered by hostilities in Kashmir, but this time with the Japanese anti-nuclear weapons sentiments and joint US-Japanese nonproliferation pressure as sub-text.)

Each of these studies is touted as being written by 'independent' groups, presumably to preempt raising the hackles of its intended readership, particularly in India and Pakistan. This word is a code for the absence of US Government funding for the project and, therefore, for the supposedly dispassionate and 'balanced' nature of the research carried out and of the remedies suggested.

**T**he Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Report written by a collection of experts chaired by a former assistant to President George Bush, Richard N. Haass, relies on *no* field research as such but rather on the cumulative experience, expertise and wisdom of people who have dealt with this region for years. The Report of the Kashmir Study Group (KSG) authored by a smaller but equally impressive array of American analysts, on the other hand, is the result of two study teams headed by Ambassador Howard Schaffer (who retired as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia) and Ainslee Embree of Columbia University travelling respectively to India and Pakistan. The aim being to sample informed

Indian and Pakistani opinions and viewpoints on a comprehensive set of issues relating to Kashmir and to use these to configure a viable design for peace.

American solution-mongering on Kashmir may be more subdued now, but it is not any less intrusive. This is reflected both in the CFR and the KSG Reports. Indeed, the only difference in the recommendations of the two studies seems to be that the Kashmir Study Group, while hewing to the same basic line, has fleshed out its solutions a little more fully. This indicates that the dispute is of such long standing, there's little new that can be offered by way of a panacea. The upside is that it precludes the airing of too fanciful solutions. If it isn't new or fanciful, then banality inevitably reigns.

**C**onsider the relevant CFR recommendations (short enough to be quoted here *in toto*) to get an idea of what the Americans believe is a workable solution to achieve 'limited objectives'. 'The United States, in concert with other governments, should seek to lower tension and violence, reduce military forces, and restore political normalcy in Kashmir. Specifically, India and Pakistan should be urged to undertake regular and sustained bilateral negotiations directed toward a ceasefire and a halt to military actions (other than patrols for strictly defensive purposes) along the line of control in Kashmir; the reconstitution and increased monitoring of peacekeeping machinery along the boundary, supplementing UN-sponsored with bilateral mechanisms if possible; and renewed negotiations for a separate, rapid agreement over the withdrawal of both Pakistani and Indian military forces from their present positions on the Siachen glacier.

'Pakistan should be urged to end direct and indirect military support to

Kashmiri insurgent organizations. And India should be urged to continue and accelerate moves to resurrect the political process in Kashmir, including grants of amnesty for those insurgents willing to abjure violence, punishment for those members of the security forces involved in human rights violations, and conduct of discussions with the newly elected Kashmiri government about the degree of autonomy for the state within the Indian constitution.' The KSG Report hoes much the same ground.

The trouble is that all this 'should' stuff – India and Pakistan *should* do this and *should* do that, is like most free advice doled out by parties unrelated to a dispute – high-minded, well-intentioned and useless. Besides, the two countries are doing many of these very things to the extent that they are, from time to time, deemed politically feasible by Delhi and Islamabad. The controversial features, such as they are, in the CFR and KSG reports, are not new but go to the heart of the matter. They are concerned separately with the instrumentalities for keeping the peace on the *de facto* border and for ensuring that human rights are respected by all concerned.

**B**y way of reconstituting the monitoring machinery as per CFR guidelines, the KSG is of the view, for instance, that the United Nations Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) be revitalised and the peace-keeping be augmented by establishing what it calls a bilateral Joint Border Security Group (JBSG). The JBSG-idea and the revival of UNMOGIP, alas, run up against an insurmountable barrier – the Indian government's basic if belated recognition that involving the UN in Kashmir by Prime Minister Jawaharlal

Nehru in 1949 was a horrendous mistake. The country has paid and is continuing to pay heavily for this and its resolve, therefore, not to entertain hereafter international nose-pokery in any guise.

In fact, Nehru also quickly realised his mistake by which time the Big Powers had sunk their teeth into it. However, what the Indian government did succeed in doing was to hamstring the UNMOGIP by circumscribing its operational ambit and capabilities with attenuated reporting procedures and bureaucratic norms. UNMOGIP, formed in the wake of the 1949 Karachi agreement, was, as a result, unable effectively to carry out its allotted task. This much is evident from Pauline Dawson's study of its working record.

**T**he history and current uncertainty attending on the status of UNMOGIP, detailed by Dawson, indicate just why the prospects of a monitoring agency, like JBSG, are bound to be bleak. The widespread and regular infractions of numerous bilateral and international accords and agreements by India and Pakistan since 1949 – scrupulously recorded by UNMOGIP – show what the two countries believe their respective politico-military stakes to be on the disputed border in particular and in Kashmir in general. It also shows the sort of niggling armed actions they are prepared to undertake on and across the Cease Fire Line (CFL) or LOC, to preserve them, even at the risk of triggering a full-blown war.

Indira Gandhi, conceding that a quintessentially internal matter relating to accession was allowed wilfully to be transformed into a full-blown international issue, attempted to undo the damage her father had done. But instead of compelling President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to convert the Line of Control (LOC) into the international

boundary, which he was in no state to resist, she settled for his agreeing to treat Kashmir as a purely bilateral matter vide the 1972 Simla Accord. An opportunity for a final solution, which is unlikely ever to fetch up again, was thereby passed up. Nevertheless, as a result of this accord, New Delhi formally deactivated UNMOGIP on its side of the LOC.

**P**redictably, the Pakistan government soon rediscovered the value of the UNMOGIP as a lever to keep the UN hand in the dispute and of the benefits accruing from its twin policy of aiding and abetting the Kashmir insurgency and of 'internationalising' the dispute. They publicized it as an unresolved matter pregnant with the possibilities of devastating (in recent years, nuclear) war and concerned variously with self-determination, religious persecution and human rights abuses. Multilateral, including UN, Islamic and human rights fora couldn't, in the event, but get engaged. But if the UNMOGIP is dead as far as India is concerned, there's little likelihood of something like the JBSG getting New Delhi's nod.

To monitor 'compliance with human rights covenants', the KSG ask for 'official encouragement' of local civil liberties organizations, which is fine. They then plead for the 'removal of barriers' against 'international humanitarian agencies', like Amnesty International, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Asia Watch, and go on to suggest that agencies be set up, preferably under the aegis of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), to police the human rights situation region-wide. Transparently, the last is nothing more than an after-thought to cover up for the prospective shenanigans of Amnesty International and outfits of that ilk. And, in any case,

such concessions will beget more problems, even if they 'better assure India's credibility' as the KSG claim.

The CFR and KSG reports are, where Kashmir is concerned, at best Pollyannaish exercises and it is just as well that they have passed without creating much of a ripple here. But that said, for purely academic reasons, there are some striking consensus views elicited by the KSG team visiting Pakistan. These views, perhaps, are born as much of frustration and exasperation as a gradual adjustment to the reality of India's preponderant political, economic and military power in the region and growing presence in the world. They are notable only because they point to an eventual, mutually acceptable, solution revolving around the status quo, i.e., the LOC as the international boundary.

**T**here is a second, less credible but more complicating, sub-genre of 'American' research in this area – the writings by Indians in the US 'doing' South Asia for a living. In trying to establish their bonafides or sucking up to the Establishment – take your pick – they end up not just dancing around the official US line, but extending it; i.e., they end up pushing a more American line than the Americans these days are prepared to.

In the event, such people and their 'research findings' could persuade a few of the generally uninformed American influentials in and out of government, who might mistakenly assume that these expat Indians (i) have an intuitive and substantive grasp of the subject (which is arguable) and, (ii) represent a strong or popular viewpoint in India (which they clearly don't).

Moreover, if it is a well-known institution 'sponsoring' the said 'research', like the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, as in Ganguly's

case – there is the danger of a flawed assessment of the situation laced by faulty analysis based on questionable premises being inputted as a possibly winning idea into US policy considerations. Official American thinking about South Asia is sufficiently skewed as it is to need no such help.

But in this latter category there is the occasional report of some substance. Like the 'Documented Briefing' by Ashley Tellis for the RAND Corporation and the US Army's Arroyo Center's Stability in South Asia released a few months back. Specialists working in think-tanks in the thick of US military policy-making tend to be far more realistic in their analyses than individuals and institutions intent on realizing private, idealistic agendas or pursuing mainly academic schemes of marginal to questionable utility.

**T**his is not the place to review the RAND Report, but Tellis (a Goan presumably, from Mumbai) in arguing the various policy options open to Washington, does so in measured terms, coming down ultimately on the side of prudent caution, of reconciling to the current and future military imbalance in the subcontinent favouring India. Considering that he is an NRI endeavouring to make good in America, it is no surprise that he ends up with advice to exploit the evolving situation in the region in a way such as to advance US national interests. Still, up to that point his albeit linear and somewhat simplistic analysis is, from the Indian perspective, at least not egregiously wrong.

(The only political scientist of note of Indian origin in North America that I can think of who, over the years, has consistently and unabashedly argued India's case and India's national interests from India's point of view, whatever the subject – security, Indo-US relations, geostrategy, poli-

tics or the mixed economy, is Baldev Raj Nayar, professor emeritus at McGill University, Toronto.)

**T**o revert, Ganguly makes it exceedingly difficult to take The Crisis in Kashmir seriously. For one, his solution is a dressed up version of the offer to Pakistan made in 1963 by the Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh to draw the dividing line in Kashmir on the Chenab. Fortunately for India, Singh's opposite number at those talks, who else but Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, over-reached himself and rejected a solution that many Pakistani strategic analysts have ever since rued as the great lost opportunity (much as many of us here do the Simla Accord which Ganguly, incidentally, believes was a 'diplomatic triumph' for India) – an opportunity in terms of a larger slice of Kashmir territory being brought under direct Pakistani control.

The Swaran Singh-Bhutto talks, it may be recalled, were held when Delhi was under intense US-UK pressure prompted by the British Commonwealth Secretary, Duncan Sandys (who is misidentified by the author as the British Minister of Defence – p. 45) to make big concessions to Pakistan over Kashmir in return for President Ayub's undertaking not to attack India in case the Chinese resumed hostilities in the North and the East.

It is not clear, however, why Ganguly thinks this offer plainly made under duress long ago by a China-spooked Indian government would be found acceptable by a now much more powerful and self-confident India. It is as if nothing had changed since then, as if the 1965 and the 1971 wars had never occurred and had not, in any case, radically transformed the distribution of power in the subcontinent and the region at-large. It is like asking Washington to assume that the

Cold War was still on and to treat Russia as if it were the USSR of yore as a means of improving US-Russian relations.

Further, Ganguly recommends that India make concessions on Sir Creek, Wullar Barrage and the Siachen Glacier along with additional 'limited territorial concessions' on the LoC and urges that the militants be favoured with full amnesty followed by an election under international supervision. And by way of completing his peace edifice, Ganguly not only seeks reversion of the state to the pre-1952 status, but its empowerment to draft a new constitution for itself!

**B**ut, assuming for arguments' sake that the territorial concessions were made by India but without the plebiscite – because an internationally-supervised election is just that – what's there to prevent Pakistan from continuing with its low cost strategy of encouraging the insurgency in the part of J&K still remaining with India. And if it did that, wouldn't India's situation be worse off and the options open to it more truncated?

With modesty unbecoming a would-be architect eager to realize a grand design for peace in South Asia even if it wrecks India in the process, Ganguly describes his grand design as constituting not 'a complete panacea' but 'a politically realistic approach'. And he tries to endow his solution with a certain reasonableness by, first, juxtaposing it against a policy, he claims, was communicated to him by 'a small coterie of individuals' in India who, of course, are not identified. This policy advocates cutting the losses by pronouncing victory in J&K, ceding the Valley to Pakistan, and getting the hell out of there! And second, by worrying about the 'long term morale effect' of waging a anti-guerilla war on the Indian Army. This last is

not particularly convincing because, earlier he hails the success of counter-insurgency operations in the Indian North East as a stellar achievement.

**R**ank escapism and daft proposals are one thing. Inadequate knowledge of history on which some of these are based is something else altogether. For instance, Ganguly declares rather blithely that Maharaja Hari Singh 'temporized' on accession after August 1947. The Maharaja may indeed have contemplated (as Sheikh Abdullah did) presiding over an independent 'Switzerland of Asia', but by now there are sufficient records (not least the writings of Justice Mahajan deputed by the monarch to liaise with Nehru) to indicate that much before 15 August 1947, and the lapse of British paramountcy, Nehru time and again deferred a decision on accepting Kashmir's accession to India until such time as, in his view, it also had popular support as symbolized by the backing of Sheikh Abdullah. This delay is what caused the original problem in the first place.

Having thus misread history, it is not surprising that Ganguly finds Delhi's tolerance of Abdullah's malfeasance and misrule 'a paradox'. It is hardly so considering that the Indian government's mollicoddling had a larger motive. For Nehru the Sheikh represented the democratic impulse of the people and, once the dispute was internationalised with its referral to the UN, he became the lynchpin for the Indian case. Given the opportunist Abdullah's mercurial shifts in thinking, Delhi could not possibly risk alienating him by pulling him up on relatively unimportant issues, like corruption and improprieties in governance.

But such debilities are compounded by the other weaknesses in Ganguly's study. Some have to do

with historical detail. For instance, the first Indian troops to land in Srinagar were not the Paras (p. 11), as Ganguly states, but a battalion of the line infantry regiment, 1 Sikh.

Another set has to do with his sociological framework. In attempting to work out Samuel Huntington's thesis about political order in developing societies, he sources the insurgency to the fact of the spread of literacy but the incapacity of the state to provide adequate jobs to the now educated youth. Kashmir, he concludes, represents 'both the mobilizational success and simultaneously, the institutional failure of Indian society.' This begs the question: How is this situation any different from that found in any other region of India? And, if it isn't different, would he then also condone the educated unemployed getting involved in secessionist movements in their provinces? Or, contrarily, would he have rather that Kashmir had been deliberately kept a backwater and literacy not been facilitated via generous subsidising of mass education?

**O**ne of the primary causes of popular disaffection in Kashmir was the religious nationalism propounded by the Jamaat-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir since 1942. This was given a boost in the 1970s and the 1980s by the mainly Saudi financed organization, Ahl-e-Hadis, whose programme for indoctrination of the young and the susceptible provided the feedstock for the Pakistan supported insurgency. This significant facet of the problem mentioned in passing by Ganguly has been more fully developed by Major Maroof Raza, who analyzes the ensuing lethal 'combination of Kashmiriyat and Islam'.

Raza, a former Indian Army Grenadiers officer, has done what Ganguly did not – track the slow and

inexorable slide of J&K into insurgency and the depths of despond on the basis of talking to scores of well-placed individuals within the state government and the law and order apparatus and those in the Kashmiri society at large. He helps us to better understand just why the Kashmiri rebellion took the form and the route it did. With the Sheikh Abdullah government unwilling to reign in the activist mullahs cooking up discontent in the madrasas from the 1970s onwards, the question is why did the central government too turn a Nelson's eye to this development?

**T**he immanent danger for a multi-religious country such as India lies, first, in the central and state authorities being unable to distinguish between religious freedom and religious licence. Second, and more alarmingly, in the political leaders and parties' reflexive habit to exploit religion and religious symbols for petty political and electoral gains.

A third set of infirmities deals with Ganguly's methodology. He has relied on sources, or rather, and this is disconcerting, on one source for some very critical information about life and society in Kashmir and specifically the Srinagar Valley in the time of insurgency. Whether he did in fact do 'field research' by actually travelling to Kashmir is not clear. But if he did – because his footnotes suggest he met with some Kashmiri leaders – then his reliance on just one person, Amitabh Matoo, for singular bits of information is problematic.

Matoo, a Kashmiri, is a good enough scholar at JNU alright. But to base subsequent statements and conclusions on just this one person's opinions is to take the easy, but questionable, way out. It is to do the academic equivalent of what journalists-in-a-hurry are often accused of doing.

Whatever the CFR, KSG and RAND reports may say or Ganguly may claim, the core issue with Kashmir insofar as foreign interests are concerned, however, is not so much the possibility of Indo-Pak war (which is manifestly remote) as human rights. But human rights watchdogs running wild skirt the fundamental issue involved: Kashmir is not a run of the mill law and order problem, but a war of secession. If as that 'great liberator', Abraham Lincoln, declared that he'd gladly countenance slavery and agree to keep the United States 'half free and half slave' if that kept the Union intact, the arguably less 'enlightened' Indian leadership can hardly be faulted for acting on their conviction, which reflects the will of the people, that the future of Kashmir as an integral part of India is no more negotiable than, say, a separate Confederate South was in terms of Lincoln's America.

**W**ould good ole Abe have tolerated an Amnesty International making a nuisance of itself about human rights as General George Sherman advanced with his army in that extraordinarily destructive 'march' which razed the Confederate Capital, Atlanta, to the ground and otherwise reduced, with extreme prejudice, the southern states into servility? Lincoln obviously acted on the not unreasonable belief that in a life and death struggle, a state cannot be expected to be bothered with the Marquess of Queensberry rules or to permit any outside interference under any guise or pretence.

The fact is that the settled countries of the West, having in a sense completed the messy transformation involving the ruthless coercion of minorities of various kinds to merge into the national mainstream, surely, have no ethical or moral standing to lec-

ture countries currently in the throes of configuring modern societies.

**B**ut in the matter of blame for putting the country on the defensive with regard to human rights, surely it rests in large measure with the official Indian stand. From Nehru's days, New Delhi has always acted as if its self-professed moral superiority inoculated the country against the inherent pains of crafting a nation state from its disaggregated parts. The fact that nation building is invariably a bloody and messy process has simply not been understood or admitted by the Indian government and the political leadership. Which is one reason why it sounds apologetic on human rights, when the more forthright attitude of turning a deaf ear to the human rights-wallahs would have been more honest and self-respecting.

It is hypocritical in the extreme for anybody to insist that on the cusp of the 21st century human rights matter more than they have at any other time in history. Different countries are at different stages in their national development. India is still not at that stage where a strong national identity automatically restrains the momentarily marginalised peoples from seeking recourse to violence and 'betterment' outside the whole. In the circumstances, New Delhi's policy from the start should have been one of a forceful execution of policy of nation-building, coupled with a no-nonsense warning to outside forces to keep their concerns to themselves.

New Delhi's efforts in Kashmir and the North East all these years have, alas, been akin to pricking a boil, involving less bloodletting than pusletting. It has allowed self-serving extra-territorial entities (be it countries or do-gooder organisations or, worse, do-gooding HR transnationals prompted by motivated countries) to

interpose themselves in the issue. The constraining of the armed forces' prosecution of counter-insurgency operations is a fallout of the Indian government buckling under pressure to the western human rights lobby.

It is time that New Delhi had a declaratory policy which asserted that the overarching public good being the maintainance of the Union, this will be realized at any cost, and it will always and every time take precedence over the rights and freedoms of individuals and groups within the country. It follows that the use of the sometimes brutal means to subdue those seeking to sunder the Union is almost an imperative, as the experiences of many western countries have proved. Flinging the violent domestic histories and records of the western countries back at them is an excellent tactic to stem unwanted, and largely undeserving, criticism.

**T**he ceaseless production of studies, reports and recommendations by 'independent groups' and 'task-forces' rooted in present day American/western value system has reached that point of diminishing returns when the targeted audience has simply had too many of these papers looking at the situation in the same sort of way and of preaching the same sort of things. Actually, other than exciting a few NGOs and academics here, these studies are so much waste of paper. Lacking anything new to say, what effect they have, if any, is actually a negative one of firming up an ultra nationalistic backlash.

Foreign analysts would be well advised to give 'peace in Kashmir' as research theme a rest. It sure could benefit from some benign neglect. Because, whatever *they* might advise us to do, India and Indians will solve the Kashmir problem exactly as it suits our narrow national interests.

# The idea of democracy

YOGENDRA YADAV

THE story of Indian democracy at fifty is fairly predictable. There was a golden period when a charming prince ruled. This was followed by a steady decline during the reign of his progenies, real and otherwise. Finally, local chieftains and thugs took over, leading to chaos and continuous crises. The storyline is simple but powerful. Like all such stories, it has the power to give meaning to any event, big or small, and to provide a yardstick for distinguishing the normal from the deviant. Like all stories, it looks at things from a particular vantage point and provide us a moral. It is a comment on the simple charm of this story and the social origins of ideas about Indian democracy that it continues to dominate the imagination of all political analysts.

The challenge of understanding Indian democracy at fifty requires that we tell this story differently. For this palace-eye-view of politics has hidden from view things which lie in front of us. And its moral is deeply, if subtly, anti-political. It is important to contest this story. After all, *homo sapiens* are story-telling animals. Retelling the tale of one's life is only reinventing a new future for oneself.

The establishment of democracy was an invitation by the Indian elite to the ordinary citizen to join them in the new game. It was a bold invitation, for the modalities of the game were

not clear to the hosts. Besides, they did not know their guests particularly well. The history of Indian politics since Independence is a story of how our people responded to this invitation and discovered a new game, at first with hesitation and amusement and then with obsession and fierceness. It is a story of what this encounter did to them and to the game itself.

What happened was not difficult to anticipate. After the initial unease, many guests felt at home in the new setting and changed the rules to suit their taste. They soon turned their back to the hosts and enjoyed themselves. It was a different game now, which shared little, except the name, with the original design. It took on a new avatar and was played for purposes substantially at variance with the textbook version or the original intentions of the hosts. No wonder, its consequences proved to be radically different from what was intended or anticipated. It threw up a new set of opportunities and constraints for which there were no precedents.

The story unfolded itself in various stages. The first phase, the famous 'Congress system' of the 1950s and 1960s, was characterised by a wide gulf which separated the all-powerful westernised elite from popular beliefs. It was no doubt a democracy, for the game was decided by numbers. But

only the brave called it a democracy of ideas. This democracy was firmly guided. The democratic invitation was accepted by a significant number, large enough for the hosts to be soon outnumbered and defeated in the game they had initiated. But the structure of the game basically followed the rules set by the hosts. There were deviations and distortions, but on balance the game was manageable, or at least recognisable. The idea of democracy was placed inside an incubator. The surroundings were artificial but it saved the infant at a crucial period.

**N**ehru's school teacher like mannerism symbolised the didactic relationship in which the political elite stood vis-à-vis the ordinary people. In terms of ideas it clearly was a one-way traffic. Even political protest was cognitively loyal, notwithstanding a Lohia. The citizens were autonomous in this realm only to the extent to which they managed to misunderstand the ideas they received from above, a privilege lower orders of society have enjoyed throughout history. From a certain vantage point, it was a fairly satisfactory state of affairs. If you were born in the right kind of family, took care to keep away from the heat and dust and took a telescopic view of things, Indian democracy appeared much like an authentic or at least a 'developing' liberal democracy. It was like viewing photographs inside cardboard motorcars in rural fests: the visual effect largely depended on the indulgence of the viewer.

The insulation of democracy from popular beliefs had a real life effect as well. It provided democracy a breathing space and an initial settling in period for a new set of institutions. A relatively low level of participation and competitiveness helped early institutionalisation. The electoral system, party organisations, legisla-

tures, judiciary and the bureaucracy managed a grace period where their capacities were not subjected to the strenuous test of popular democracy.

At the same time, the legacy of nationalism meant that the new regime enjoyed a high level of legitimacy, even if the people did not quite understand what they were supporting. Occasionally the game threatened to break down, for popular beliefs refused to be tamed on questions such as the one of linguistic states. But a skilful political handling routinised, and thus rendered harmless, the legitimate political expression of regional diversity. Popular self-identities were granted a back-door entry by all parties through a process of politicisation of castes. A combination of good design, skilful execution and good fortune thus ensured that the new democracy did not create alienation among, or face deep-seated hostility from, those whose beliefs had little room for play in that setting.

**T**he Nehruvian phase of Indian democracy is widely seen, and rightly so, as a period of consolidation. The intention behind emphasising the discursive chasm that characterised this period is not to undervalue its achievements but to remind ourselves of the artificial conditions which made them possible. The much too loudly proclaimed nostalgia for this period often implies a longing for an infinite extension of those conditions. It barely conceals a deep, suppressed desire to save democracy from the people.

The second phase of Indian democracy is recalled in all the stories as signalling a failure of the system, as the beginning of its regrettable decline. It is equally plausible to read this phase as the natural outcome of the earlier one of successful installation and consolidation. It marked the coming of age of Indian democracy. The infant was now taken out of the

incubator and placed in the more natural, if also more risky, environment. Far from being a result of a failure of the system, it was a direct consequence of the extraordinary success of democratic politics in drawing out some new strata of the people into the political arena.

**A**s more and more participants adopted this game, they brought to bear on it their expectations, demands and beliefs. At least some of them – the large and landed OBCs and a small section of Dalits – thought it was about time they too had a say in framing the rules of the game. This phase was also marked by the beginning of an interaction between elite ideologies and popular belief systems. As competition grew more intense, political actors were forced to pay attention to the tastes and preferences of the ordinary voters. The first casualty of the new compulsions of the political market was the edifice of borrowed high ideologies, both of the government and the opposition. These had to be quietly and quickly replaced by home-spun, or rather home-made, patchwork ideologies. The result was admittedly shabby. Stitched in haste by tailors of varying skills, the new clothes did not quite fit the customer. Yet a paradigmatic change had taken place. Everyone now conceded that the clothes must fit the body, and not the other way around.

The immediate result of this paradigmatic shift was the rise of populism as the dominant political ideology. Populist ideology did not reflect popular beliefs, let alone rework high ideology in the light of popular aspirations and needs. At this stage there was little room for ideas to travel bottom upwards. The Indian version of populism involved a selective appropriation of the language of socialism, which had been popularised in

the previous decade. Socialist symbols and rhetoric served to package substantive policies which had little to do with an egalitarian agenda. In fact mainstream politics grew less sensitive to the real needs of the people, at least those which did not lend themselves to easy aggregation. Yet, insofar as rhetoric tends to bind down the actors, the language of socialism also set limits to what could be defended and legitimately debated in the political arena.

**F**irst deployed to reap electoral harvest in 1971, populism continued as the reigning ideology of Indian politics till the end of the 1980s. Different political brands were worked out by recombining familiar elements under the socialist label. Elections were about whose claim to offer the same menu was seen as more credible by a national electorate which now cut across the old regions. The conditions were thus ripe for a series of plebiscitary elections where a more or less uniform swing across various states created electoral waves. In this Congress Opposition system, one party dominance gave way to one party salience.

This first encounter of Indian democracy with popular beliefs left it at once deeper and weaker. It helped Indian democracy take roots. Greater participation and more intense politicisation showed that the process of democratisation continued. The system of representative democracy had greater acceptance among the people than was imagined at the beginning of India's democratic career. Repeated, almost ritual, alteration of governments gave the people a sense of control and contributed to their sense of political efficacy. Leaders like Charan Singh and Karpoori Thakur articulated new and hitherto excluded voices in the political mainstream as did movements like Navnirman,

Bihar and Naxalbari which incorporated issues from outside the party political framework.

At the same time, the failure of socialist rhetoric to deliver the goods contributed to a deep-felt popular frustration. This period showed up the weakness of political institutions as exemplified by the Emergency. The cultural presuppositions embedded in the imported liberal democratic institutions clashed with the everyday practice of Indian public life. The process of an erosion of political institutions, especially those which required functional autonomy, had begun. The catch-all character of the populist ideology squeezed out some of the claims to power based on regional and ethnic identities leading to political crises in Assam and Punjab.

**T**he third and the current phase of democratic politics was inaugurated by the simultaneous arrival of the three M's—Mandal, Mandir and Market—on the domestic horizon and the collapse of the USSR, which effectively signalled the demise of the hegemony of the language of socialism in Indian politics. The fundamental change in the terms of political discourse which followed was sudden and unanticipated, but it did carry forward the story of the encounter of the language of democracy with popular imagination. The third phase took the encounter a step further.

The removal of the token necessity of the idea of socialism had both a liberating and a debilitating effect on the democratic contestation of meanings. Some of the new set of beliefs which came into play in this phase were from the lower orders of society and articulated interests which were not possible under the previous ideological hegemony. This development liberated a Kanshi Ram or a Laloo Yadav from packaging their sectional

demands in the language of high ideology. It made possible a reconfiguration of the 'third space' to allow for a coalition of regional parties with the left. It could also lead to a further reconfiguration of what appears today as the Congress-UF space.

**I**f the second phase had turned the ordinary voter into a customer whose tastes had to be taken into account by political entrepreneurs, the third phase turned them into demanding and often discerning customers. In this sense there is, for the first time, a flow of ideas from below. It is not surprising that this also happens to be the period when a democratic upsurge is taking place among the hitherto disempowered sections. Among Dalits this upsurge is reflected in a jump in political participation, from voting to membership of political parties.

There is a beginning of a change among Adivasis too, for their turnout recorded a sudden jump in the 1996 election, although other signifiers have not recorded a similar change. For women, an increase in participation has affected all the signifiers except voting turnout. These are not meaningless statistics. Nor is the fact that India is perhaps the only major democracy in the world where the turnout and political activity of a certain kind is higher among the very poor than among the upper middle class. These are nothing if not instances of a participatory upsurge associated with the journey of the idea of democracy.

This radicalisation of the discursive encounter does not by itself produce a radical agenda of politics. The loss of the received language of high ideology and an inability to replace it with a home-spun alternative has deprived political formations of the lower order of any aggregating or screening device. The beliefs brought



to the centre of politics by the rise of the lower orders (especially Dalits and the OBCs) are fragmentary in character, concerned only with one section and with a single issue (BSP's slogan '*Vote hamara raj tumhara nahin chalega*' captures the evocative power and the narrow vision of these ideologies) and are incapable of mediating competing sectional claims.

**T**his constraint, coupled with the sudden collapse of the earlier consensus, which had in any case worn thin, created conditions for the discursive coup in the form of Manmohanomics. Almost overnight it succeeded in overthrowing the established economic consensus and installing a new common-sense of liberalisation and globalisation, without any evidence of popular demand or support for such a drastic turnabout. The happy acceptance of the agenda of liberalisation by the UF partners only underlines the flip side of the current discursive flux. The successful deployment of the cultural symbols of the subalterns by the Sangh Parivar in the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation also serves as a reminder of the consequences of an absence of broader ideological filters.

A meek surrender to forces of economic globalisation and a sharpening of ethnic cleavages may have left a deeper wound on the polity than is now visible. It may already have eroded something of the extraordinary autonomy that politics has enjoyed in post-independence India. Some of the signs are visible in the middle class driven politics of anti-politics, be it in the name of electoral reform or clean politics. The BJP's political ascendance can only further strengthen these trends.

Fifty years ago, the decision to create a democratic polity in a poor, unequal, post-colonial society did not look as courageous as it does in retro-

spect. Perhaps the mood of the time enabled everyone to forget that no other society had successfully traversed this path before. Nor has it been done since. India failed to remove poverty or inequality or even remove the cultural traces of post-coloniality; yet it has succeeded in remaining a democracy. Ironically, it is precisely when Indian democracy is evolving a specific language of its own that politics may lose its historical specificity and India may begin to reflect the routine logic of democratic politics in a poor, post-colonial society. Developments of the last few years thus crystallise a paradox inherent in this story of the encounter of India with the idea of democracy.

**L**et me round off this story by raising a general question: what does it mean to install a democracy? Implicit in much of what is wrong with the dominant story of Indian democracy or for that matter in contemporary democratic theory, is what may be called a 'hardware' approach to democracy. According to this approach democracy is above all an institutional mechanism which can be made to work properly in any setting, given the right conditions of installation. The approach implicit in my story, on the other hand, treats democracy more like a language, a 'software'. The software called democracy must be continuously re-written in the language of its end-user, the ordinary citizen. The point of using a software is its value-addition – it cannot even begin to work without establishing a firm protocol of shared symbols. If it has to have a life, democracy must exist in and through the minds of ordinary people; it must learn to work its way through their beliefs and values.

Or, to change the metaphor: what happens when the idea of democracy travels downwards? Perhaps

some founding fathers of our democracy, the original hosts to this game, entertained the illusion that the democratic idea would remain intact as it travelled downwards. Gradually larger and yet larger number of persons would come to embrace the package of liberal democracy in the same form in which the elite had believed. Alternatively, some romantics believed that the idea of democracy is automatically transformed by the people when it reaches them. They make democracy speak their language and devise the system best suited for their needs.

The experience of the last five decades confirms neither of these versions. The journey of the idea of democracy in India not only changed the lives of millions it touched, it also changed the idea of democracy itself in more ways than one. Call it creolisation or vernacularisation of democracy, this transformation is at the heart of whatever success democracy has achieved in India. Serious attempts to marry the democratic idea to popular beliefs, to develop shared protocols with the pre-existing language of the people, is what has distinguished India from other countries where the democratic enterprise never took off. It can continue to maintain this distinction in the future.

**C**reolisation by itself is no magic remedy. Indigenisation of democracy is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one for the working out of this idea. A large historical process follows no pre-ordained script. It does not produce neat outcomes. It leaves gaps, it produces contradictions. And there is no hidden hand here which might straighten every wrinkle. There is, in other words, no short-cut to creating and sustaining the language of radical democracy except weaving every strand and tying every thread.

# From victory to defeat

OMKAR GOSWAMI

IF it weren't for its awful consequences, the manner in which Sitaram Kesri was hijacked by non-performing, born again hawks of the Congress party would have been cause of much mirth. After Kesri's first aborted attempt at the prime minister's berth in March 1997, the old codger was reconciled to living in a state of limbo — where his party was neither on the treasury benches nor on the opposition's. To give him the little credit that is due, Kesri had built a good rapport with the affable United Front (UF) Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, who, on his part, kept the Congress leader informed of governmental matters.

Unlike previous coalition governments in the Centre under Morarji

Desai, Charan Singh and V.P. Singh, this UF administration did not collapse under the weight of its own internal contradictions. While it might be all very well for Bharatiya Janata Party's Jaswant Singh to describe the government as 'a fifteen legged centipede', the fact of the matter was that the partners were getting their act together and Indian citizens were getting used to a coalition that was beginning to deliver the goods. To be sure, the government had its weak links, with C.M. Ibrahim, the Union minister for civil aviation, and Ram Vilas Paswan, his colleague in the railways, taking the top slots. However, countering their abysmal performance were P. Chidambaram, Murasoli Maran, supported by a cast

as diverse as Chaturanan Mishra, Jayanti Natarajan, B.B. Ramiah, and some other straight-thinking politicians, backed by Gujral himself.

As in most governments, the reform rhetoric of the UF's ministers sometimes outpaced actual action. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that reforms were once again moving on track – the more so after the somnambulism that characterised the last two years of P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure as prime minister. Chidambaram's audaciously bold budget of February 1997 rekindled the spirit of reforms that had petered out in 1995 and 1996.

**W**hile it is doubtless true that the government failed to meet the fiscal deficit target of 4.5 per cent for 1997-98, I would argue that Chidambaram's second budget should not be viewed in a short term perspective. Unlike Mani Shankar Aiyar, who lampoons Chidambaram as 'Superman in a veshti', I believe that the 1997-98 budget radically altered our approach to tax policy. Poor countries with vast bureaucracies perforce treat tax revenue as a milch cow, and the logic that, up to a point, collections may rise with a fall in tax rate does not often cut much ice.

Going by the signals given in his first budget in July 1996, one expected the thin-skinned lawyer-finance minister to be a risk-averse fiscal marginalist. On 28 February 1997, he proved us wrong. Slashing personal income tax rates to 30 per cent, corporate taxes for Indian companies to 35 per cent, and eliminating double taxation of dividend income were not the marginal changes of a cautious man. These were powerful signals to investors and individual savers that the government was determined to cut loose from its fiscal past. And I would not blame the finance minister for fail-

ing to meet the fiscal deficit targets. To ask a counter question to Mani Aiyer and his friends: Do they seriously think that Chidambaram would have met a 4.5 per cent target had he kept the old tax rates? Almost certainly not.

As a key signalling device, therefore, the budget clearly underscored the UF government's commitment to hasten the pace of reforms. But that was not all. By late 1996, it had become apparent even to the Reserve Bank of India and the North Block mandarins that the tight money policy which was adopted to curb inflation in 1994-95 – when the wholesale price index shot up by 12.5 per cent – was devastating swathes of the industrial sector. Reacting to the heady days of reform in 1992-93 and 1993-94, almost every corporate house had embarked on major projects.

Suddenly, in 1995-96, the bottom fell out of the primary equity market. As if this was not enough, interest rates began to harden, and companies found themselves not only investing in the future on the rump of high cost debt but also operating in the present on the basis of very expensive working capital. By late 1996, profits had taken a beating and the ugly red blotches that dotted the corporate landscape in 1996-97 were testimony to doing business in a competitive milieu with uncompetitive cost of credit.

**T**o his credit, Chidambaram realised this very quickly, and the last two credit policies of the previous RBI governor, C. Rangarajan, ushered in a more realistic monetary environment. There were reforms directed to the supply side as well as the organisational aspects of banking. Making RBI's Bank Rate a reference rate and progressively reducing it to 10 per cent, cutting down the cash reserve ratio that banks had to deposit with the RBI from a 12 per cent to a

target of 8 per cent in March 1998, and freeing deposit and lending rates were some of the reforms that eased the borrowing cost of corporates.

In addition, there were major reforms on the anvil in commercial law. A brand new Companies Bill was drafted in record time. I was a member of the committee that did this task. Members would fly in to Delhi from various parts of India, spend an average of three days a week – often working late into the night – to redo the bill from scratch. With enthusiasm, a group of dedicated professionals introduced concepts like buy-back, employee stock options, derivatives, efficient winding up procedures, and some of the best international norms for corporate disclosure.

**T**o be sure, some galling provisions were inserted without the knowledge of the committee. Nevertheless, the bill was a clear statement of corporate reform and ought to have become law during the 1997 winter session of Parliament. So, too, would have been the new Sick Industrial Companies Act and the Foreign Exchange Management Act. And, unexpected by all, there was a major breakthrough in the Urban Land Ceiling Act, with the cabinet deciding to recommend its repeal rather than piece-meal amendment.

Chidambaram was not the only reformer. Murasoli Maran's unfortunate public duel with Osamu Suzuki over the Maruti affair cannot detract from the zeal with which foreign investment proposals were cleared in the industry ministry. Indeed, Maran has notched up a record of sorts by clearing the largest number of FIPB approvals in the shortest period of time.

Of course, there were failures, the most important of which was a rapid capitulation to the wage demands of government employees – where the

state doled out an extra Rs 15,000 crore without demanding greater efficiency in return. No less significant was the failure of the so-called 'disinvestment' programme of the government. I have always argued that when privatisation is called 'disinvestment' it is doomed to failure. The reason is simple enough. By its very meaning, disinvestment suggests a revenue raising exercise to be implemented via marginal reduction of shareholding, while privatisation means that what was once the government's now belongs to the private sector. In a country seeped in the tradition of public sector – where much of the intelligentsia still believe that the government should produce steel, cement, fertilisers and offer hotel rooms – disinvestment is a sure-shot recipe for failure. It is like asking Bishen Singh Bedi to open the innings and then expecting him to score a century. Not surprisingly, despite earnest efforts by G.V. Ramakrishna, whose Disinvestment Commission produced master plans for several public sector enterprises, nothing worth the while has happened. The only exception was MTNL's GDR offering which, despite turmoil in world capital markets, managed to garner \$358 million.

**D**espite these failures, the general consensus was that we were once again moving along the path of economic reform. But, more significantly, people of the country were seeing that it is possible for a coalition to politically govern a country as complex as India. Cynics who had written off the UF as a bunch of dead-beats saw Chidambaram and Maran develop working relationships with Chaturanan Mishra, Indrajit Gupta and even Ram Vilas Paswan.

64

The most heartening feature of the government was its commitment to federal polity. On the one hand, states were realising the importance of

growth and the need to attract investments on a competitive basis. On the other, the Centre was increasingly loosening its 40-year hold on state-level decision-making. The litmus test of this was the manner in which the Centre was encouraging states to directly access programme assistance for restructuring from The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank – instead of interfering in each and every process, as it had done in the past.

**A**s we were gingerly making our way forward, tragedy struck from the most unexpected quarters. There was a superannuated judge who had got one extension after the other to investigate matters relating to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. He resided in relative obscurity in one of the many subsidised bungalows that dot Lutyen's Delhi; he was full of self-importance, hungry for fame and his office leaked like a sieve; and he wrote unbelievably atrocious English. One fine day, he met with the executive editor of a leading weekly, and the rest is history.

The absurd drama that followed would have made Eugene Ionesco rush for cover. However horrific his death, the fact is that Rajiv was killed more than six years ago. And one would have thought that lapses in his personal security and infiltration in Tamil Nadu by Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam would have been matters for the history book. Can one imagine Lyndon Johnson's government falling had there been Milap Chand Jain type revelations about 22 November 1963? But, as we know too well, *Mera Bharat Mahan*. So, we were spectators to vignettes that could only be produced in the sub-continent. Consider a few choice examples.

An ideologically crippled party led by a rudderless old non-leader suddenly decides that it is the honour of

the slain leader at stake. It therefore looks for signs of action from the Sphinx-like Italian widow – who is expected to give up her housewife's tasks, utter the magic words, 'Ido' and don the mantle of a vengeful Durga. She doesn't. So, the great leaders of the Congress party camp outside 10 Janpath to catch the slightest twitch of the fair lady's left eyebrow. She twitches, she twitches not, they mutter amongst themselves. Finally, the born again hawks of the party decide to raise the clarion cry of national honour.

And who are these hardliners? Jitendra Prasada, who has never fought a real election in his life, who clawed his way to the top by fawning and back-stabbing, and under whose illustrious leadership Congress won only 5 seats in U.P. out of 85 in the last Lok Sabha elections. A close second is the inscrutable Arjun Singh, who is smart enough to give the world the impression that he kow-tows to 10 Janpath while placing two of his proteges in the UF government. Then there is the masterful ex-minister for petroleum, Satish Sharma, whose legendary bequests of petrol pumps and gas distribution centres is matched only by the Italian tiles of his swimming pool. The list goes on.

**T**hese great leaders of the Congress decide that the country is not worth bothering about, that governance is inconsequential, and, hence, that their solemn duty is to get rid of a government and force another crisis in the name of Rajiv Gandhi. And they do so. Neither the powerless Kesri, nor the desperate first-time MPs can stop the 'Honour Rajiv' cabal. History will underscore how bizarre it all was – how a dozen has-beens could force their writ on a party and, thence, on the country.

From the day President Narayanan dissolved the 11th Lok

Sabha, all policy decisions of any import have been put on the backburner. Already, the hallowed politicians of the land are fishing around for strategic alliances. Mulayam Singh Yadav, whose motto is 'U.P. is India, and India U.P.', is finding out ways of creating alliances to regain his status in the home state. Kanshi Ram is playing god. The BJP are willing to welcome anyone in their fold. The Congress MPs from Orissa are sussing out the BJP, as is a faction of the Maharashtra Congress. The rat race has well and truly begun.

**A**t this stage, it would be certainly foolhardy and probably impossible to predict the outcome of India's unwanted 12th Lok Sabha elections. However, a couple of things can be said with near certainty. First, with the current flock of leaders, the Congress will be decimated at the hustings. I would be very surprised if it wins even 90 seats. That will be a fitting reply to the Congress. Second, unless G.K. Moopanar purges his Sonia bug and decides to ally with the DMK according to Karunanidhi's terms, the Tamil Maanila Congress is all set to be wiped out. Thanks to Justice Jain and the Congress, it is no longer possible for Moopanar and Chidambaram to simultaneously play the Tamil and the Congress game. For TMC, fence-sitting time is over.

I am of the view – more accurately, of the faith – that the elections will further strengthen regional parties and give a larger numerical support base for the constituents of the UF. However, that will really depend upon the nature of pre- and post-electoral alliances and, more significantly, on how many Congress seats are snatched by the BJP. In fact, the stupidity of Congress has made matters easy for Advani and his ilk. Now they no longer need to talk of Ram, Ayodhya,

Kashi and Mathura. They can speak of the unity of the nation, usurp the slogan *ekta aur akhandata* and present themselves as the stable national alternative. Thanks to the Congress, people may believe them sufficiently enough to give BJP 230 plus seats.

All this is crystal ball gazing. Far more certain are the consequences of this dissolution and election on the economy. The East Asian crisis had unwittingly presented India with one last opportunity to catch up with the ASEAN nations. Most experts believe that it will take Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia another year – perhaps 18 months – to restructure their economy and financial systems. Equally, everyone who understands the region knows that these countries will come back with a vengeance, this time with an efficient financial sector and more competitive exchange rates. For Korea, Japan and Malaysia it goes beyond economic restructuring. It is a matter of national honour. To understand that one has to see a photograph that was recently published in a newspaper. It showed Korean mothers donating gold rings to the national cause – like we did during the Chinese aggression in 1961.

**T**his was a godsent opportunity for us to speed up the pace of reforms. We needed to pass all the economic bills that were waiting to be legislated; to open up the insurance sector; to rapidly privatise and use the proceeds to focus on social sector spending; to take advantage of the depreciation of the rupee and reduce import tariff rates to ASEAN levels; to accelerate the pace of financial sector and capital market reforms; to put in transparent investment guidelines and eliminate FIPB; to encourage a ten-fold increase in foreign direct investment; to sanction as many power projects as possible and encourage the states to privatise trans-

mission and distribution; and much, much more.

Even before the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, our leaders were being smug about the East Asian turmoil. The chant that we heard the most was: 'They were overambitious and therefore collapsed. It is a sure sign that we, the slow and steady, are doing the right thing.' We've heard this from Gujral (who hasn't the foggiest idea of what reforms are all about) and from Chidambaram – who lectured the delegates at the World Economic Forum about the need to 'calibrate' reforms.

**W**hat bosh! In an integrated world, reforms are not about levels. They are about rates of growth, of speed. The fact that India is better-off in 1997 compared to 1991 is of no consequence. Malaysia is incomparably better off in 1997 vis-à-vis 1991, as are Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, China, let alone Korea and Japan. In the last six years we have grown at an average of 5 per cent. Notwithstanding the East Asian crisis, our competitors have grown at 7 per cent. Therefore we have slipped at the rate of 2 per cent per year for six years.

Even the best of our political leaders are prone to forgetting this. So, in the best of times, we were sliding away. This was the opportunity to claw back, and we blew it. Three months of 1998 would have passed before a new government is formed and a budget passed. Another three months will pass before the new government finds its feet. By the time we wind up our old gramophone record player, ASEAN will have raced ahead to regain its supremacy and further widen the gap. And if China devalues its renminbi to ASEAN levels, it would be curtains for India. Ladies and gentlemen, let's all join together and thank Chacha Kesri for giving us such a great present.

# Economic diplomacy

SANJAYA BARU

CONSIDER this true story. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 a group of Koreans stuck in Kuwait quickly moved into their country's embassy from where they hoped to fly out and return to Seoul. Was it safe to drive from the embassy to the airport without getting into trouble with Saddam's soldiers was the question uppermost in their mind. A Korean company executive had a bright idea. 'My company's name and logo is very popular in Iraq,' he explained. 'I suggest we fly my company flag on our vehicles rather than the national flag and drive out.' The suggestion was accepted and the entire group drove safely to the airport, with Saddam's soldiers waving along the way, shouting out the name of the company! While trade still follows the flag in some parts of the world, increasingly it is the flag which follows trade in contemporary times.

Receiving this writer in his office in Brussels in 1993, a senior European Commission official pointed to the computer screen on his table which showed EU's trade and investment links with the world and said: 'In the past

India did not appear on this screen, so for me it did not exist. Today, it figures prominently, so it matters.' In defining India's relations with the world in the post-Cold War era, economics and business have come to the fore.

The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the so-called 'centrally planned economies', the emergence of East and South East Asia, including China, as the new engine of growth in the world economy, the globalisation of economic activity and regional integration encompassing major industrial economies as well as newly industrialising countries, the emergence of new communications and information technologies accompanied, paradoxically, by protectionist tendencies in the OECD economies and so on, have altered the external environment in which the Indian economy, like any other, operates.

Economics has been at the heart of diplomacy in the nineties. Strategic analysts who viewed the relationship between nations largely through the prism of geo-politics and military might, have come to recognise that

in the post-Cold War world, geo-economics has acquired primacy. It could be argued, however, that economics has always been central to international relations even when politics was in command. As early as in December 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru told the Constituent Assembly:

'Talking about foreign policies, the House must remember that these are not just empty struggles on a chess-board. Behind them lie all manner of things. Ultimately, foreign policy is the outcome of economic policy, and until India has properly evolved her economic policy, her foreign policy will be rather vague, rather inchoate, and will be groping. It is well for us to say that we stand for peace and freedom and yet that does not convey much to anybody, except a pious hope... (and) every country is prepared to say the same thing, whether it means it or not.

'What then do we stand for? Well, you have to develop this argument in the economic field.... To come to grips with foreign policy in economic, political and various other aspects, to try to understand it, is what ultimately matters. Whatever policy we may lay down, the art of conducting the foreign affairs of a country lies in finding out what is most advantageous to the country. ...I regret that we have not produced any constructive economic scheme or economic policy so far... when we do so, that will govern our foreign policy more than all the speeches in this house.'<sup>1</sup>

**W**hile the foreign policy of a country may from time to time be influenced by specific non-economic, purely strategic or political priorities,

1. Jawaharlal Nehru quoted in Dewan C. Vohra, *Economic Relevance of Non-Alignment*, ABC Publishing House, Delhi, 1983.

Nehru's emphasis on the underlying importance of economic policy influencing the long term foreign policy framework of a country, well appreciated in the context of the post colonial, 'bipolar' world he was functioning in at the time, is even more relevant in the contemporary post-Cold War world of pragmatism and business-orientation in foreign policy. What is 'advantageous' to a country can no longer be defined purely or even primarily in political or strategic terms, but must fundamentally be defined in economic terms.

One of the lessons of the post-War era and indeed, the lesson of the history of the Cold War, is that sooner or later the success of a country's foreign policy is circumscribed by the efficacy of its economic policy. Successful economies have a greater degree of freedom in shaping an independent foreign policy than failed or weak economies. More importantly, economic policy can itself be an instrument of foreign policy if it enables a country to win friends and influence people.

**A**dmittedly, in the era of decolonisation and at the height of the East-West confrontation, some countries in the South, especially India, could afford to pursue a foreign policy which had a higher profile than was warranted by the strength of their economy. In the post-Cold War world this is no longer possible. Equally, pragmatic rather than ideological considerations have come to the fore in relations between nations. This was evident even in the 1970s after the oil shock of 1973 when strategic policy analysts recognised the importance of geo-economics over geo-politics.

Control over high technology is clearly even more critical to political power today than control over economic and natural resources whose

importance the oil crisis underscored. Since such control is increasingly exercised by non-sovereign, extra-national corporate entities, the ability of nation states to deal with such multinational corporations is central to the success of a country's foreign policy. Equally, with the spread of regional economic groups and regional integration of economies, India's external economic relations with her neighbours are critical to the success of her wider foreign policy goals.

**T**he emerging structure of power in the post-Cold War world has been described by many analysts as being 'multipolar'. US strategic policy analyst, Henry Kissinger, the most prominent exponent of this view, aptly summed it up in the following words:

'The international system of the 21st century will be marked by a seeming contradiction: on the one hand, fragmentation; on the other, growing globalisation. On the level of the relations among states, the new order will be more like the European state system of the 18th and 19th centuries than the rigid patterns of the Cold War. It will contain at least six major powers—the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia, and probably India—as well as a multiplicity of medium sized and smaller countries.

'At the same time, international relations have become truly global for the first time. Communications are instantaneous; the world economy operates on all continents simultaneously. A whole set of issues has surfaced that can only be dealt with on a worldwide basis, such as nuclear proliferation, the environment, the population explosion, and economic interdependence.'<sup>2</sup>

2. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994

While it is premature to regard India as a major power today, it is necessary to recognise that it is capable of becoming one within the first half of the next century. Indian policy-makers, especially politicians, have not yet adequately appreciated the wider policy implications of such a status for India. The Chinese leadership seems to have a better appreciation both of the opportunities and the responsibilities that a 'major power' status brings with it.<sup>3</sup>

What are the implications of this worldview for India's foreign policy and her economic policy? The most important implication for us is that the non-aligned nations no longer have the bargaining power that the Cold War gave them. The smaller, less developed, more outward oriented economies with the non-aligned movement discovered this fairly quickly and adjusted themselves to the new environment.

**T**he course of the Uruguay Round of GATT talks showed that the postures adopted in the 1986-89 period were quickly abandoned after 1990 and most developing economies chose to fall in line with developed industrial economies, especially the US, by the time the Marrakesh agreement was signed in December 1994. Despite the more reassuring assessment of the global power balance by Kissinger, most Third World leaders believed that the bipolar world had been rep-

3. See for example I.K. Gujral, 'The Post-Cold War Era - An Indian Perspective', and Wu Xueqian (former Chinese foreign minister) 'The Post-Cold War Era - A Chinese Perspective', in *World Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January-March 1997). Compared to Gujral's more cautious and traditional view of Indian foreign policy in the post-Cold War world, Xueqian is more forthright in stating that a bipolar world is being replaced by a multipolar world in which the United States will continue to be the strongest economic and military power. He sees Japan, the European Union, Russia and 'a number of developing countries including China and India' as other major powers:

laced by a unipolar one. The quick and resolute conclusion of the Uruguay Round after the Dunkel Draft was circulated in 1992 reflected this assessment.

**E**ven a small country, if a sizeable economy, like South Korea started reflecting on these issues almost immediately after the end of the Cold War. Commenting on Korea's 'New Internationalisation Strategy', the President of the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, Jang-Hee Yoo, said in early 1993:

'At the end of the Cold War, a new international order was created when a militaristic balance of power was replaced with an economic balance of interests. The world economy in the 1990s should eventually see a multipolar system in which the US economy shares the economic leadership with the EC and Japan. Asia's newly industrialised economies have also put themselves in a strong international position.... Recent changes in the international economic environment and Korea's increasingly significant position in the international community suggest that drastic reform should immediately be made in Korea's foreign economic policy.'<sup>4</sup>

Offering a 'positive' agenda of what Korea should 'do' to meet this

Wu Xueqian goes on to add: 'The multipolar evolution—even though in a transitional stage—has become so irreversible that even the existing superpower has to take into account the possible reaction of other countries when taking important decisions on foreign affairs.... The emergence of the developing countries is also a major event in contemporary international relations.'

4. Jang-Hee Yoo, 'A New Internationalisation Strategy of the Korean Economy: Suggestions and Recommendations', in Jang-Won Suh (ed.), *Korea's New International Economic Diplomacy and Globalisation Policy*, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, Seoul, 1993.

emerging situation, rather than what it should 'oppose' (a usually Indian approach!), Jang-Hee concludes:

'A unified Korea could eventually be listed as one of the top ten economies in the world. It might, along with other major industrial powers, lead the world economic order. If this is to happen, Korea will not only have to participate in all major international organisations, but it must also take partial responsibility for world economic growth and stability.... Coping with the globalisation trends of the world economy is the most important task on Korea's economic agenda for the next several years.'

'From Korea's perspective, while the forward growth model is still the basis of economic growth, the new forms of protectionism in the international economy (offensive market production, technology protection, environment protection) may threaten rather than provide opportunities. Therefore, instead of continuing the existing passive or defensive policy actions, Korea's foreign economic policy should be reformed affirmatively towards market openings. Without this dramatic change, the Korean economy may lag behind other dynamic, open economies in a rapidly changing world economic environment.'

**W**ith the passage of time and a fuller appreciation of the Asian economic miracle, notwithstanding the recent crisis in the East Asian markets, it is now clear that the Kissinger view has greater credibility and the world is indeed likely to see competing centres of power emerge. The next decade or two will witness constant competition circumscribed by structured cooperation between major and minor powers. The multipolar power struc-



ture is going to influence the manner in which the forces of competition and the mechanisms of cooperation operate.

Whether it is the functioning of institutions like the WTO or the outcome of discussions on a multilateral agreement on investment (MAI), whether it is transfer of technology or the movement of people, nothing will be shaped by the power structures of the Cold War era, in which super-power rivalry and ideological conflict defined the outcome of any given competition or attempt at cooperation. Nor will the United States always be able to unilaterally dictate the terms of resolution. It will have to look to other major powers for support on an increasing number of global issues.

**I**n the coming years multilateral negotiations can have wholly unpredictable outcomes since the forces of competition and cooperation will be in a state of flux, until the six major powers are able to define a new equilibrium. China's increasingly high profile presence in multilateral forums can only add to the flux. India still cannot take its position within the multipolar structure defined by Kissinger for granted and will have to work hard at it – both on the foreign and strategic policy front as well as on the domestic and external economic policy front. This is by no means an easy task.

What does this mean in operational terms for Indian diplomacy? Foremost, India must accept the privilege and challenge of being a major power. It must not only seek the political power that such a status confers on it, as when it did in not signing the NPT and the CTBT and in (hopefully) continuing to seek a Security Council membership. This is the easier part of the challenge. The more difficult part is to pursue an economic policy

agenda, both internally and externally, which such a status entails.

India must be a major trading nation in the world, its share of world trade and investment flows must increase. Its trade and investment regime must encourage freer flow of goods, services and capital. In order to ensure this without suffering the pain of destruction of the sub-optimal structures built during the decades of protected, inward-looking development, India must quickly invest in improving the economic and social infrastructure and the skills of its people. Investment in health and education – basic, technical, professional and higher – is as imperative as is new investment in power, irrigation, communications and transportation, both in the public and private sectors. The public sector, especially in defence related industries, must be rejuvenated as an instrument of advanced research and development of new technologies.

**A**ll the other major powers, especially USA, Russia and China, invest heavily in defence-related industries and seek to exploit technological externalities. Indian industry has rarely viewed public investment in defence, space and nuclear programmes in these terms. Public procurement and major business deals must be linked with explicit foreign policy objectives, as China has done systematically. Compare the manner in which the Chinese have used foreign investment as a means of leveraging foreign policy, best exemplified by the use of the Boeing deal to ensure continuation of MFN status by the US, and the inability of the Indian political system to view foreign investment policy within a wider foreign and strategic policy perspective.

Equally, India must improve its bargaining skills in global forums and give a sharper edge to economic diplo-

macy, both in its relations with the developed industrial economies of the North as well as in its relations with the countries of the South, particularly her neighbours. The focus of policy formulation as well as public debate in the area of foreign policy has for long remained obsessed with political and security issues so much so that economic diplomacy has till recently not acquired the primacy it should.

**E**ven the policy and the public debate on India's relations with her neighbours has not fully integrated political and economic diplomacy on this front. India's shabby response to the Sri Lankan proposal for a bilateral free trade agreement, reflecting the power of domestic lobbies, and the slow pace of development of the idea of a South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), where India can even now easily make unilateral trade concessions provided the government is willing to face up to domestic lobbies, is a telling example.

While some in government have been alive to the beneficial potential of such initiatives, there has been knee-jerk resistance from domestic lobbies and local politicians in some parts of India to proposals like, for example, the BBNI (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India) trade grouping, where local vested interests in Bengal have been lobbying against freer trade with Nepal and Bangladesh. Despite official Indian enthusiasm for ideas like BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) and IOR-ARC (Indian Ocean Rim Agreement for Regional Cooperation), domestic business response has so far been lukewarm. The lack of genuine enthusiasm within the Indian business community for a more liberal trade and investment regime underscores the limits to effective foreign economic diplomacy. Since the MEA

and the finance ministry seem to have a better appreciation of its potential, they must communicate their policies more effectively to political leaders, businessmen and the academia.

Unless India is willing to pursue a 'liberal' outward-oriented foreign economic policy, which enables it to improve bilateral relations with other major powers and other developed and developing countries, it will find it difficult to pursue a nationalist defence and security policy. Moreover, it should also be understood by those who advocate a more inward-oriented trade and investment policy that an India which is insular with respect to the developed industrial economies, cannot be open and expansive towards the economies of the South Asian region.

Acquiring economic and political leadership within the South Asian, Southern Asian or even the Indian Ocean region carries with it the obligation of being more open to global investment and trade flows. Indeed, a more liberal trade and investment regime with respect to her neighbours, through SAFTA, should be the first step in reaching out to the world, first to other developing economies, especially in Asia (through closer links with ASEAN and membership of APEC), and then to the developed industrial economies.

It should also be recognised by our policy makers that sustained high growth is as much a politically and strategically necessary objective as it is an economically desirable one. Indeed, a pro-growth and liberal economic policy is a necessary element of a strategic policy commensurate with India's status as an emerging power. Economic growth has improved the profile of Chinese diplomacy just as the lack of growth and economic crisis has reduced Russia's. It is time Indian political leadership drew the appropriate lessons.

## Satyameva Jayate

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

THERE is little space for reasoned argument in our politics. Everyone has an opinion about the Jain Commission Report, but almost no one has read it. Not that one can blame them: the report runs to over five thousand pages spread across 17 thick volumes, all in incredible detail and is very densely written. But what does the report say?

### Treason and Sedition

Following the ambushing of a Sri Lankan army patrol by Sri Lankan Tamil militants in July 1983, there were widespread anti-Tamil communal riots in Colombo and elsewhere accompanied by the unleashing of genocidal attacks on the unarmed Sri Lankan Tamil civilian population of

North and East Sri Lanka, particularly in the Jaffna Peninsula. As in 1971, when Pakistani military action against the civilian Bengali population of East Pakistan led to a massive influx of refugees and Bangladeshi militants into India, so also from 1983 onwards a large number of Sri Lankan Tamil civilians, political personalities and militants took refuge in India, almost entirely in Tamil Nadu, a state and a people with whom the refugees shared a common ethnic identity.

The Sri Lankan Tamil militants who took refuge in India represented a number of rival factions. The shoot-out in Pondy Bazaar, Chennai in 1982 between two groups then relatively little known, one of which was the LTTE, underlined the necessity of keeping the rival militants as segregated from each other as possible. This was achieved by organizing separate camps for separate groups of militants. Each militant camp was run by the faction concerned. They were permitted to impart training to their cadres. The Indian authorities also organized training for the militants.

**T**he Jain Commission has examined all the evidence led before it with respect to this training. Justice Jain has come to the considered conclusion that: 'Evidence available before the Commission indicates that the training was essentially for self-defence and not for launching military operations.' (VII, 916)<sup>1</sup>

The key pieces of evidence adduced by Justice Jain for coming to this conclusion include the following:

- \* The deposition of P. Chidambaram, who, as Justice Jain says, 'was intimately connected with the issue of

Sri Lankan Tamils,' that 'he was not aware of any training imparted to the Sri Lankan Tamil militants by the Indian Army.' (VII, 915)

- \* The deposition of Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi on 21.2.97 that 'The training was for self defence.' (V, 63)

- \* The deposition of the pro-LTTE Tamil Nadu leader, P. Nedumaran that the LTTE had refused 'to join the training programmes along with other groups' and LTTE supremo, V. Prabhakaran who said, 'even if the heaven comes, we will not take it.' (V, 56)

**I**n any case, from July 1983 onwards, the Sri Lankan government had launched a propaganda broadside against India in the United Nations and forums such as the UN Human Rights Commission and its Sub Commission on Human Rights claiming that the Government of India was assisting terrorism against the Sri Lankan state. The international community refused to give any credence to these charges. Indeed, it is precisely because India had established its credibility in the United Nations family that, when IAF planes accompanied Indian transport aircraft for the dropping of humanitarian relief supplies, including food items, to the besieged civilian Sri Lankan Tamil population of Jaffna in June 1987, no government in the world and no organ of the United Nations was willing to entertain the complaints of the Sri Lankan government that India had violated the sovereignty of its air space.

Such assistance as was provided, whether as alleged in Uttar Pradesh or in Tamil Nadu, was for 'self defence' only and for the reason given by Justice Jain: enabling the Sri Lankan Tamils to protect themselves from the genocidal assault of the Sri Lankan authorities.

There is no evidence before

Justice Jain to indicate that the LTTE was a Frankenstein's monster created by India. On the contrary, Justice Jain has found (VII, 917) that:

- \* 'Several Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups, notably the LTTE, began seriously training themselves in the hands of organizations such as the PLO and MOSSAD during the seventies as well as early eighties (i.e., long before the LTTE came to India)... it was this highly specialized guerrilla training which LTTE cadres had undergone in foreign terrorists outfits which made the LTTE a formidable enemy of the IPKF.'

- \* 'The LTTE started stockpiling arms from the international market from the early eighties onwards.... There is evidence of huge mobilization by the LTTE for purchase of arms from the international underground bazaars.'

- \* 'For smuggling of arms the LTTE purchased their first ship "M V Cholan" in 1984 and subsequently augmented their fleet of smuggling vessels.'

- \* 'LTTE cadres also underwent regular courses in wireless communications from foreign countries.'

**W**hile Sri Lankan Tamils were provided refuge and other assistance in India, the Government of India, first under Indira Gandhi and then under Rajiv Gandhi, engaged the Sri Lankan government in a dialogue to find a political solution to the ethnic question in Sri Lanka. The bottom line of the Indian stand was that India would not endorse or support the demand for *Eelam*, that is the partition of the island republic into a Tamil nation and a Sinhala nation. We pledged ourselves to preserving the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. This has remained the policy of six successive governments since Rajiv Gandhi: those of V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Atal Behari

1. In all references to the Jain Commission Report, the number of the volume is given in Roman numerals and the page number in Arabic numerals. Thus, VII, 916 means Volume VII, page 916.

Vajpayee, H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral. Since these prime ministers were drawn from several different parties, it can be asserted with confidence that there is a mainstream national consensus in India that the sovereignty of Sri Lanka will be respected but that the Sri Lankan authorities must find a political solution acceptable to the Sri Lankan Tamils.

President Jayawardene was the first foreign dignitary to visit Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi after he won the election of December 1984. Within six months, the Sri Lankan president again visited New Delhi and even accompanied Rajiv Gandhi on a joint visit to Bangladesh to meet the Bangladesh president and visit the cyclone-devastated island of Uri Char in the Bay of Bengal.

In consequence of the success of India's efforts to engage Sri Lanka in a dialogue and promote a political settlement between the Sri Lankan Tamil militants and Colombo, two rounds of negotiations between the Sri Lankan authorities and the Tamil militants were arranged in Thimpu, Bhutan during 1985. While Colombo indicated some willingness to move forward on greater political and administrative autonomy for the North and East, short of partitioning the island to bring into existence a sovereign Eelam, the Sri Lankan Tamil militants, including the LTTE, insisted on Eelam as their minimum demand. At the same time, all Tamil militant groups made it clear to New Delhi as much as to Colombo that no political settlement would be acceptable to them unless it was guaranteed by the Government of India.

Contacts continued through 1986 and considerable hopes of a breakthrough were raised when Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardene met at the Bangalore SAARC Summit in Nov-

ember 1986. Notwithstanding the disarming of all Sri Lankan Tamil militants within a week through 'Operation Tiger' mounted by the Tamil Nadu state police—an operation which Justice Jain commends and describes as proof that under MGR 'the state law enforcement machinery was capable of tackling and disarming all Sri Lankan Tamil militants in the state' (VII, 930)—the political talks did not make much progress. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan military action in Jaffna started rising alarmingly during the spring months of 1987.

While the Sri Lankan authorities were intensifying their military operations against the innocent civilian Sri Lankan Tamil population of Jaffna, the simmering revolt of unemployed Sinhala youth in southern Sri Lanka, under the leadership of a Sinhala naxalite party, the JVP, started seriously threatening Colombo's control of the southern half of its territory. Back in 1971, a similar naxalite revolt led by the same party had resulted in an urgent request by Sirimavo Bandaranaike to Indira Gandhi for assistance from the Indian armed forces. This assistance had been readily given. The precedent was much in the minds of the Sri Lankan government when the JVP revolt was intensified in the summer of 1987.

Caught between the inability of his armed forces to impose a military solution on the North and the East and the imperative need to redeploy his armed forces away from the North and East towards the South to deal with the JVP insurgency, Jayawardene began to see reason. Contacts were established with the Indian government and Rajiv Gandhi was invited to Colombo to sign the India-Sri Lanka Accord of 29 July 1987 which halted hostilities while paving the way to democratic elections for choosing a Provincial

Council for the North and the East under the chief ministership of a Sri Lankan Tamil and with political control of the Council firmly vested in Sri Lankan Tamil hands.

The Accord provided for Sri Lanka to turn to India for assistance in implementing the agreement. In accordance with this clause, President Jayawardene immediately asked India to send in a peace keeping force that would keep the peace in the North and the East while the Sri Lankan army was deployed to the South to deal with the JVP insurgency. That is how the IPKF went into Sri Lanka, not as an army of invasion but as a peace keeping force at the invitation of the Sri Lankan government.

With the conclusion of the Accord, all Sri Lankan militant groups, bar the LTTE, quickly returned to Jaffna, surrendered their arms to the IPKF and earnestly set about availing of the political opportunity presented by the forthcoming elections to the Provincial Council to secure the democratic support of the Sri Lankan Tamil people. Prabhakaran held out in New Delhi for a while, but in return for some financial assistance, agreed to go back to Jaffna, surrender arms and participate in the political process. There was even a token surrender of arms by the LTTE; in Prabhakaran's presence, to the IPKF in Jaffna.

However, when the Sri Lankan navy seized a LTTE vessel attempting to cross the Palk Straits with contraband in violation of the Accord, a problem arose about the authority—IPKF or Sri Lanka—which was to hold the captured militants in custody. The LTTE managed to smuggle cyanide capsules to the captured militants in the guise of food supplies. Every one of the militants swallowed the capsules at the Palaly airbase while the Sri Lankan authorities were arranging

for their transport out of Jaffna. This incident signalled the outbreak of armed hostilities between the LTTE and the IPKF. Eventually, some five thousand Indian jawans and armed forces officers were killed or maimed by the LTTE.

Till October 1987, the LTTE were turning to India for succour. After October 1987, the LTTE became the enemy. Once the LTTE became the enemy, any material assistance from India or by Indians to the LTTE to kill and injure Indian armed forces personnel became an act of treason and sedition. The DMK failed then, and seems even now to not understand this distinction.

**J**ustice Jain has found that whereas LTTE operations in Tamil Nadu wound down to virtual disappearance between the departure of Prabhakaran in September 1987 and the end of President's rule in January 1989, immediately after the DMK government took office in January 1989, the LTTE received protection, patronage and support to convert Tamil Nadu into 'a rear base or launching pad for fighting IPKF.' (VII, 923)

The evidence for this uncovered by the Jain Commission includes the following:

\* Memorandum prepared by the Director, Intelligence Bureau (DIB) dated 26.6.89 which says: 'Tamil Nadu has, in a sense, become a clandestine rear base for the LTTE.... DMK ministers, other party functionaries and state government officers have been extending covert and not so covert support and patronage to the LTTE'. (XIII, 77-83)

\* The same memorandum goes on to say: 'LTTE elements have also been in contact with the chief minister.... It is Murasoli Maran who is mainly orchestrating various moves on behalf of the DMK administration.'

\* DIB also reports 'a considerable degree of laxity in the responses of state administration and the police.... the LTTE has fully utilised the situation to step up its activities and specially its arms smuggling operations.'

\* DIB went on to say: 'Almost the entire eastern coastline has now become a haven for smuggling operations.... Items smuggled include gelatine sticks, detonators, explosives, different kinds of ammunition and firearms.' These were arms to be used against the IPKF.

\* The memorandum reported: 'LTTE cadres injured in encounters with the IPKF in Sri Lanka are brought to Tamil Nadu.... At least 27 persons are now undergoing treatment.' On recovery, these injured cadres were returned to Sri Lanka to resume their killing and maiming of Indian armed forces personnel.

\* 'Madras is the main communication centre of the LTTE for establishing contact with the outside world,' said the memorandum.

\* Most damagingly, DIB said: 'Madras and Coimbatore have emerged as major centres for the manufacture of arms and ammunition for the LTTE.'

**J**ustice Jain pointedly asked Prime Minister V.P. Singh whether he had any reason to doubt the veracity of IB reports. Singh replied in the negative. (VI, 671) No evidence was led to indicate anything to the contrary. Justice Jain has confirmed the active collaboration of the DMK and its leaders in protecting and promoting the endeavours of the enemy to kill and injure Indian soldiers. This amounts to treason and sedition.

Justice Jain has unearthed much other evidence of the blind eye which the DMK government deliberately turned to anti-national LTTE activities during this period of active armed conflict between the LTTE and the IPKF in Sri Lanka. This includes:

\* The manufacture and smuggling out from Coimbatore of various kinds of arms and arms components, rocket propelled grenades and Arul 89 rifle grenades for use against the IPKF. (IV, 336-346)

\* Justice Jain has also detailed the evidence that 'the LTTE was getting its supplies including arms, ammunition, explosives, fuel and other essential items from Tamil Nadu to continue its fight against IPKF and that too with the support of the DMK government.' (VII, 937)

\* Communications from the central collector of excise and customs, Trichy to the state government and DIG CID Q branch's report to the state government relating to the abduction of customs officials by the LTTE and intimidation of government officers by LTTE militants. (XIII, 122-125 and 130-133) Justice Jain concludes: 'There is no evidence to show whether any LTTE cadres were apprehended, and weapon seized, or any preventive measures taken to curb the inflow of wounded LTTE cadres.' (VI, 362-363)

\* With regard to the follow up on the abduction cases, Justice Jain finds that there was 'not only apathy but extreme reluctance. Even after the facts were clear to the investigators, the appropriate sections of law were not applied. No investigation appears to have been conducted and the case apparently was brushed under the carpet.' (VI, 372)

\* Justice Jain has further examined no less than 24 cases involving LTTE activists and a series of incidents in Salem.

**O**n the basis of a careful examination of this overwhelming body of evidence, Justice Jain finds that whereas 'prior to 1989, the militancy, particularly LTTE activity, was not anti-national in character' (VII, 924), 'soon after the DMK government took over the reins of power in Tamil Nadu

(in January 1989), the LTTE slowly began to consolidate itself in the state.' (VII, 937) He has also reproduced the Intelligence Bureau's summing up of developments during 1989. (XIII, 142-145) He concludes: '1989 signified the perpetuation of the general political trend of indulging the Tamil militants on Indian soil and tolerance of their wide-ranging criminal activities.' (VI, 415)

The DMK government was in office through all of 1989. During all 12 months of 1989, the LTTE, with the active connivance of the DMK, killed and maimed thousands of Indian jawans and officers. That is what is called giving aid and comfort to the enemy. That is what amounts to treason and sedition.

DMK spokesmen and their supporters have sought to portray these acts of treason and sedition as being excused by the political contacts maintained through this period by the government of India with the LTTE, sometimes through the DMK.

**I**t is normal and regular in times of war to maintain political contacts with the enemy with a view to ending hostilities and finding peaceful solutions. After all, when the Americans and North Vietnamese were engaged in war, there were regular political contacts in Paris and elsewhere between the two sides, some overt and some covert, some direct and some through intermediaries. Indeed, Henry Kissinger and Vietnam's Le Duc Tho jointly won the Nobel Prize for Peace for the negotiations they conducted aimed at the conclusion of an agreement to end hostilities even during the period that their armed forces were at war with each other.

It is one thing to talk peace with the enemy and quite another to provide material and moral support to the enemy. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

did indeed ask the DMK to talk peace to the LTTE; the DMK, instead, equipped the LTTE to run a rear base in India to fight the Indian Army. The fact that the DMK even now is unable to see the distinction shows how unfit it is to be part of any government at the Centre.

There are two red herrings which have been drawn across our paths in the aftermath of the tabling of the Jain Commission Report. One is the allegation that what the DMK did was in consonance with the decision of the Rajiv Gandhi government to release some 150 LTTE militants held in Tamil Nadu jails even while the LTTE was engaged in armed hostilities with the IPKF. The fact is that the detainees were not flown from custody in Tamil Nadu to liberty in Sri Lanka. They were moved from custody in Tamil Nadu jails to the IPKF detention centre near the Kankesanthurai cement factory in Jaffna. Only a couple of them were released and that too after Army Intelligence, in consultation with local sources, had concluded that they 'would not constitute any threat to the IPKF,' as Gen. A.S. Kalkat, Commanding General of the IPKF, has said. The rest of them were held in custody throughout the entire period that the IPKF were in Sri Lanka. They were released on the orders of Prime Minister V.P. Singh only when the IPKF was withdrawn from the island.

**T**he second item of disinformation has been V.P. Singh's allegation that Murasoli Maran had been informed by Rajiv Gandhi that he, Rajiv, would 'secure Eelam for Prabhakaran.' In his deposition before the Jain Commission on 10.9.1996, LTTE central committee member, Kasi Anandan, who met Rajiv Gandhi in March 1991, said: 'I went to Shri Rajiv Gandhi with the purpose that he may support for a separate Eelam. He did not tell that he

will support Eelam. I did not insist for his promise for a separate Eelam. Till that day I knew that he was opposing to Eelam.' Murasoli Maran himself refused to endorse V. P. Singh's version of the Rajiv-Marani conversation although invited to do so by Justice Jain.

### Assassination

Rajiv Gandhi was killed by an assassination squad led by 'Sivarasan'. The same Sivarasan had led the assassination squad which massacred EPRLF leader Padmanabha and 15 others in Madras on 19 June 1990. Justice Jain has found 'striking similarities' between the two assassinations. (VII, 942)

**A** key piece of evidence confirming the DMK's role in letting Sivarasan and his accomplices get away with the Padmanabha killing is the sworn statement of R. Nagarajan, Home Secretary to the Karunanidhi government, before Judicial Magistrate I, Trichy, dated 30.11.1991. (XIII, 158-178) Justice Jain draws attention to Nagarajan's deposition where 'he said that whatever statement he gave before the Magistrate is a true statement and not a false one.' (VII, 687) The following quotations from Nagarajan's statement will establish the extent of the DMK's complicity with the LTTE:

\* 'The policy direction given by the chief minister was not to disturb anyone coming for treatment from Sri Lanka. The police could not screen them and result being that the LTTE cadres penetrated into our territory freely during this time. The real trouble started only because of this approach.'

\* 'The chief minister was told that the arrival of large numbers of LTTE cadres disguised as refugees would 'force a serious threat in the maintenance of law and order and ultimately would affect the security of the state. The chief minister has shown no response.'

\* After the incident at Pattinam Kathan on 18.2.90 where one police constable was killed and 10 others injured, Nagarajan says Q branch told him that 'the reason (there) was no improvement in the investigation' was that one of those involved in the shoot-out 'was a close friend of M. Alagiri, son of then chief minister.'

\* Nagarajan says DIG Ramnad was unable to apprehend the culprits responsible for the Pattinam Kathan incident because 'the scheduled operation date was changed under the oral orders of the chief minister.... When I checked up this with G. S. Ramanan (DIG, Ramnad), as well as with the DGP both confirmed it. DIG CID also confirmed it.... After few days, the operation was carried out, nothing was available at the spot.'

**I**t is against this background of what Justice Jain has described as 'the unusual ineffectiveness of the police... due to their awareness that the LTTE rank and file operating in Tamil Nadu has political patronage of the ruling Party' (VII, 941-942) that Nagarajan's sworn statement in respect of the Padmanabha massacre has to be evaluated. Nagarajan's statement says:

'At about 10.45 p.m. (on the day of the Padmanabha massacre), once again DGP contacted me and explained the arrangements done already, and when I asked him what steps were taken to apprehend the culprits, he informed me that the chief minister has asked me that the police need not evince keen interest to trace them out till his arrival next day... when I asked about the chief minister's instruction to the DGP, DIG CID Jaffar Ali also confirmed it.'

Justice Jain has also taken into account the depositions of J. Ramakrishnan, SP, who supervised the investigation into the case and the

affidavit filed by S. Sripal, former DGP. Justice Jain has also taken into account a detailed DIB memorandum dated 25.6.1990; (XIII, 338-343) The clinching evidence was provided by the report of the Tamil Nadu special investigation team (TANSIT). Of course, depositions made by M. Karunanidhi himself and others have been fully taken into account. Justice Jain concludes: '...as is seen from the oral evidence available before the Commission, it appears that the inaction on the part of the state government is being justified retrospectively... what cannot be justified is the non-performance of the entire state machinery when faced with such serious incidents of crimes committed by foreigners on Indian soil.' (VI, 578)

Justice Jain has found that 'investigations conducted after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi disclose that Sivarasan— one of the key accused in both the cases— continued to move unhindered between Jaffna and Tamil Nadu even after the assassination of Padmanabha. During the period he was actively making preparations for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.' (VI, 583) Other LTTE members of the killer network still moving about even after the Padmanabha massacre and involved in the Rajiv assassination included Periya Saanthan, Ravi, Mahesh and Vicky. (VI, 583-584)

**J**ustice Jain has also examined measures taken by the DMK government after the Padmanabha massacre to assuage outraged public opinion and concluded that:

'The above steps, as enumerated by the concerned, do not give an impression that the assassination of Padmanabha in the heart of Madras has any serious effect leading to any serious streamlining of the functioning of the state administration.... There are reports during this

period of active connivance of some DMK leaders with the LTTE. It has also been reported in several intelligence inputs that the LTTE was in continuous interaction with the Chief Minister, Karunanidhi, primarily to ensure that their activities continue unhindered even after the Padmanabha killing.' (VI, 597-598)

**T**wo of the most important Intelligence Bureau reports cited in this connection are nos. 18 and 20, both dated 28.6.90, which have been summarised by the Jain Commission. (VI, 613-614) In these reports, it is stated *inter alia*:

'One Natesan, as LTTE emissary, met M. Karunanidhi on 26 June 1990. Karunanidhi desired that the LTTE should provide him advance information regarding their movements so that he could ensure that the movements were unhindered. It is reported that Karunanidhi endorsed the assassination of Padmanabha since he perceived Padmanabha as a betrayer deserving to be liquidated.... He also branded the former North East Council Chief Minister Varadaraja Perumal as a betrayer *who deserved to be liquidated as well*' (emphasis added).

Another key piece of evidence is LTTE activist Kasi Anandan's statement to the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of 7.7.91 and his deposition before the Commission. In that statement Kasi Anandan said: 'Karunanidhi directed Nagarajan the Home Secretary to render assistance to LTTE vehicles for unhindered run of the state.' In his deposition, Kasi Anandan said that he and Natesan had met M. Karunanidhi. 'He has met several times alone and once or twice with Natesan. Both of them met Karunanidhi more than once.' (VI, 626-633)

Nagarajan's statement before the Trichy magistrate recounts numerous other examples of collusion between the LTTE and the DMK for months after the Padmanabha killing: \* Regarding the incident at Thiruvannikovil: '...there was heavy local political pressure and one MLA from the ruling party namely, Malarmanan along with few party men prevailed upon police from entering into the premises and then *he was contacting the chief minister directly to get his order to local police...* the result was no weapon was recovered and only a bundle of clothes were available' (emphasis added).

\* Regarding supply of essential items and explosives, Nagarajan says DIG Trichy 'informed me that the chief minister during his camp at Trichy orally informed him that the transport of essential goods by LTTE men need not be obstructed. This was further confirmed by the DIG CID also.'

\* Regarding the raid at Thillai Nagar, Trichy, in which Kasi Anandan was caught but allowed to go, DIG CID informed Nagarajan that this was 'at the oral instruction of the chief minister.'

\* With reference to the Samayapuram incident, where 'huge quantities of gelatine sticks' were recovered, Nagarajan says only a small proportion was seized 'and the rest of the quantity were handed over to the same persons who stored earlier at Thillai Nagar house *after getting oral clearance from the DIG CID and the chief minister*' (emphasis added).

\* Regarding the arrest near the Pattukottai of five LTTE cadres involved in the Padmanabha murder case, Nagarajan says: 'it was brought to my notice that some of the personal assistants serving under the minister, namely Thiruvallargal Sundaram and Thangavelu stood for surety for the accused.'

\* Madras city police commissioner informed Nagarajan that 'a request

came from the minister Subbulakshmi Jegadesan to release him (a LTTE cadre) without registering a case.'

\* 'Q branch SP told me orally that the manufacturing of uniform clothes for LTTE men in Sri Lanka has been going on at Erode... and it was done at the instance of Subbulakshmi Jegadesan.'

\* DIG CID prepared a list of 26 persons 'who were aiding, abetting and smuggling of goods, explosives and other essential items' but when the list went to CM 'the then chief minister had given clearance for apprehending only six persons.'

\* IG law and order, informed Nagarajan that 'we carried out the orders of the chief minister to inspect the areas and deny the existence of the LTTE.'

\* 'It is known fact that the LTTE has enjoyed political patronage. *On the oral instruction by then chief minister*, the law enforcing missionary (*sic*) had given them encouragement and they enjoyed local support politically for their activities' (emphasis added).

IB reports show that the collaboration and connivance between the DMK and LTTE continued after Chandra Shekhar became the prime minister.

'Report no. 48 speaks of Kasi Anandan having received information in advance of the arrival of central para-military forces to the state... and Kasi Anandan therefore alerted the LTTE militants to scatter in order to avoid a swoop on them.' (VI, 631-632)

Justice Jain points out that 'the statement of Kasi Anandan contradicts the statement of Karunanidhi on several important aspects... from the statement of Kasi Anandan, thus, it would appear that the state machinery *including the chief minister* were helping and supporting the LTTE... the veracity of the IB reports is thus established and the same finds corroboration on some subjects from the statements

of V.P. Singh and Kasi Anandan.' (VI, 632-633; emphasis added).

Justice Jain has also relied heavily on IB and DIB reports, reproduced as annexures M-92 to M-102, (XIV, 387-419) dealing with numerous individual cases of collaboration and collusion between the DMK and the LTTE. This leads Justice Jain to the following conclusions:

\* 'If the IB reports of the period are looked into they would clearly present a picture of connivance of the DMK government in the LTTE activities surfacing on the soil of Tamil Nadu.' (VI, 669)

\* 'There are plenty of IB reports which made expressed mention of M. Karunanidhi's actual line of action in relation to the LTTE... the veracity of the Intelligence Reports during the period of V.P. Singh has not in any way been disputed or challenged by V.P. Singh. They stand as they are.' (VI, 670-671)

It is in this manner that the DMK collaborated with the LTTE in setting up and maintaining through the period January 1989 to January 1991 the network which first carried out the assassination of Padmanabha and, emboldened by the lack of action in that case, went on to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi.

### Rajiv Gandhi's Security

Justice Jain has found that, immediately after Rajiv Gandhi demitted the office of prime minister, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB) were asked to undertake a fresh threat assessment of the threat to Rajiv Gandhi as a former prime minister.

On 9.12.1989, RAW reported that while there was no particular threat to the new prime minister, V.P. Singh, the threat to Rajiv Gandhi had substantially increased. The reason for the



increased threat perception was that terrorists gunning for the Gandhi family anticipated that Rajiv's security would be lowered, thus making him more vulnerable. (XII, 80-85)

Justice Jain has also integrally reproduced IB assessments from Amritsar, Madras, Bombay and Jaipur in December 1989, which show that all these IB regional offices were of one view that far from the threat to the former prime minister having decreased since he demitted office, it had increased, and that too for the same reason as identified by RAW. (XII, 69-75)

**J**ustice Jain has also found that three of the senior officers most closely involved in Rajiv Gandhi's security as prime minister—Cabinet Secretary T.N. Seshan, Director Intelligence Bureau M.K. Narayanan, and Additional Secretary in the PMO R. Vasudevan—had all recommended the continuation of SPG cover or the provision of SPG-equivalent security. All three were summarily removed from their positions within the month of December itself. The only senior officer connected with security who was carried over into the entire period of V.P. Singh's premiership was the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, B.G. Deshmukh. Deshmukh alone had advised against amending the SPG Act to cover the former prime minister, over-ruling his Additional Secretary, K.R. Venugopal, who pressed till the end that this be done. (XII, 163)

Justice Jain has further found that the alternative security arrangement was put together when the IB was headless. Narayanan was removed at the end of December and it took more than two months for a replacement to be named. In the meanwhile, the alternative security arrangement was devised, never reviewed and its operation on the ground never monitored.

This headless Intelligence Bureau 'followed a flawed perception... which was contradicted by their own threat perception reports. The fallacious threat perception was contrary to, and inconsistent with, the inputs received by IB headquarters... such a calibration of inputs was nothing short of misrepresentation on the part of IB.' (IV, 333)

Indeed, it was not only IB that, with the summary dismissal of its chief, discovered the virtues of 'misrepresentation'. Justice Jain finds that 'The question of Rajiv Gandhi's security was not at all considered in its true and correct perspective.... At all three levels, i.e. security agencies, bureaucrats and the cabinet... vital factors were totally overlooked, especially the grave nature of LTTE threats to whom Rajiv Gandhi, a ex-prime minister, had become an easy and soft target—more vulnerable to attacks from such determined and deadly elements.' (IV, 232)

**D**id V.P. Singh have any alternative but to withdraw SPG protection? Justice Jain offers two such measures that might have been taken:

\* 'It was possible to have provided SPG protection to Rajiv Gandhi after he ceased to be prime minister by amending the SPG Act which would have been easily achieved; operational constraints... could have been overcome (IV, 330); or

\* 'The possibility of raising another specialised force (similar to SPG but under another name)... was not examined though it was suggested.' (IV, 332)

It is this 'casual consideration' of security for Rajiv Gandhi in the face of 'overwhelming evidence to indicate that threats to the life of Rajiv Gandhi increased after he ceased to be prime minister' that has shocked Justice Jain. Considering that Rajiv was

'the most threatened Indian in recent times' (III, 184), Justice Jain stresses that 'the level of these threats... further accentuated after he ceased to remain prime minister. This fact alone made his security considerations stand on a singular footing—unparalleled so far and not comparable to any other dignitary.' (IV, 329)

**T**he alternative security arrangements put into place after the withdrawal of SPG were deeply flawed. The personnel strength was slashed to a tenth of what it had been under SPG; the technical wing, which was the heart of the SPG security system, was removed. Advance Security Liaison (ASL), which was the core of the SPG security system on tour, was abandoned. Proximate security was reduced to a single personal security officer (PSO). Instead of the Blue Book, which contains security instructions for the most threatened individuals, the Yellow Book, which is for dignitaries (like ex-presidents) not so threatened, was made the basis of security arrangements for Rajiv Gandhi on tour.

State governments, which have no experience or expertise in the protection of the most threatened persons, were entrusted with the entire responsibility for providing protection. 'The efforts of the security system should be to create as many barriers as possible between the assassin and the target.... In the case of providing security cover to Rajiv Gandhi, especially from such rabidly determined killers as the LTTE, the implementation of this tenet is conspicuous by its absence.' (III, 187)

What is worse, neither the V.P. Singh government nor its successor called for any reports to see how the alternative security system was actually working on the ground. Justice Jain says: 'it also appears that no study of the actual operation of the

alternative security scheme was ever made. It did not go into the consideration that the LTTE had already spread its network... it also did not go into the consideration that during the election days particularly, the visits of Rajiv Gandhi would be more frequent and even in interior areas and countryside.' (IV, 335)

**I**t is on the basis of these finding that Justice Jain comes to his damning indictment of V.P. Singh, that his alternative security arrangements for Rajiv Gandhi 'cannot be said to be prompted by genuine and bonafide intentions... the consequence (assassination) may not have been intended but the devising such an inadequate alternative security scheme resulted into such an unintended consequence.' (IV, 339)

As regards the responsibility of the Chandra Shekhar government, Justice Jain draws attention to the assurance extended by Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar on the eve of his assuming office to Ratnakar Pandey, Congress Rajya Sabha MP from the same eastern U.P. region that Chandra Shekhar hails from, that he would upgrade the security arrangements. (IV, 325) Instead, says Justice Jain, 'it appear that no thought was given to the security of Rajiv Gandhi by the government led by Chandra Shekhar.... The threat scenario during his period had drastically changed and required a complete streamlining of the security arrangements for Rajiv Gandhi, which was not contemplated at all.' (IV, 317 and 341)

Pointing out that it was during Chandra Shekhar's prime ministership that 'the mastermind of the assassination, Sivarasan, was sighted in Madras in April 1991,' Justice Jain holds that 'even in such a scenario the Chandra Shekhar government did not care to provide the needed protective cover to

Rajiv Gandhi either in the form of SPG by effecting amendment in the Act or in any other form by providing protective cover of some other force comparable to SPG.' (IV, 313-314)

An attempt has been made to cover up Chandra Shekhar's responsibility by quoting out of context a reply to the prime minister from Rajiv Gandhi in February 1991 saying he did not want further protective measures taken. In fact, the letter referred only to some civil works proposed to be undertaken on the periphery of 10 Janpath and Rajiv's reply said that this should not be done until the proposals had been discussed with him.

**T**he inescapable conclusion to which one is led by any objective reading of the reports of the Verma and Jain Commissions is that while security arrangements at 10 Janpath were relatively satisfactory, they were impregnated with danger when Rajiv Gandhi was on tour. The intention clearly was to keep him bottled up in his home in Delhi so that he could tour the country only at immense personal risk. As Leader of the Opposition, it was Rajiv Gandhi's national duty to travel the length and breadth of the country whatever the risk to his person. Equally, it was the duty of the government of the day to provide him full protection wherever he went. The governments of V.P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar failed in their duty. Rajiv Gandhi fulfilled his – but had to pay with his life for exercising his fundamental right as a citizen of India to participate in the political life of the country.

Rajiv Gandhi is dead. But the truth of his assassination is slowly unravelling. The story of this entirely avoidable tragedy will be brought to a conclusion when Justice Jain submits next February the second and last part of his report. *Satyameva Jayate!*

# Judge and be judged

RAJEEV DHAVAN

THE close of 1997 is an appropriate time to review the status and work of India's increasingly controversial 'Supreme Court led' higher judiciary. On 31 December 1995, the daily newspaper Asian Age paid tribute to Chief Justice Ahmadi as the 'man of the year'. The year 1996 was the year of Justice Kuldeep Singh who batted with a verve for juristic innovation and the style of a one-day international cricketer to protect India's coastline, the Taj Mahal and Delhi from environmental damage. He also penalised ministerial corruption with exemplary damages. As the *hawala* case advanced with menacing speed to close in on leading politicians, Chief Justice Verma found himself on the cover of India Today.

The *hawala* trials were unsettled as politician after politician was released on the basis of a Delhi High Court ruling that the crucial diaries indicting them were inadmissible in evidence. Many of Justice Kuldeep

Singh's orders were reviewed and reversed. Clamouring for recompense, a political attempt was made to wrench judicial domination of recruitment to their own number. Complexity courted confusion as the year ended simultaneously with a furious controversy over whether Justice Punchi should be the next Chief Justice of India as well as a proposed ordinance to raise judicial salaries and pensions.

Judicial intervention was welcomed at a time when administrative malaise was compounded with large scale corruption. Yet, general – and not just political – doubt seized the public on whether the high profile 'justice' offered by strong judicial personalities was a reliable way to summon Indian democracy to find its strengths.

But, the question whether the judiciary can be trusted with the enormous powers through which it has found self-expression cannot simply be decided on an empirical review of its performance. It is no less fundamental to be clear about our expecta-

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tions of the judiciary as an institution of state and governance. Before the advent of the British, Indian society followed an entirely different jurist-led and civil society based concept of law and justice. If we know little about pre-British judiciary, it is because the judiciary of these earlier epochs was not a crucial institution of state or governance.

Jurist based legal systems are fundamentally different from those which rest their authority on the power and prestige of a powerful state. Neither the Dharmasastra nor the law of the Shariat needed an all powerful state to claim the exclusive monopoly to declare or enforce their legal norms.

**T**he new 'modern' system of law which requires a politically designated sovereign to create and enforce law is only three or four centuries old. In simple versions of modern law, the judiciary has always been regarded with suspicion. Political sovereigns have been wary about the possibility of their authority being questioned and undermined by judges. In this simple version, the judiciary is seen as being no more than a unique *bureaucracy of state*.

When the British introduced a new political system of law in India, they were gravely concerned, in the words of a famous Dispatch of 1834, about creating a 'judiciary utterly uncontrollable by the government and, on the contrary, controlling the government.' This echoed well-known Benthamite antipathies to judges and the common law. But, the British realised that faith in the governance of the Raj could not be achieved just by the army and administration.

Accordingly, the judiciary was roped in not just as a unique bureaucracy, but as an *institution of state* which was designed to be seen as independent of the administration.

This enhanced respect for the judiciary which, in any event, remained toothless in dealing with the executive because the latter had taken due care to ensure that the British judiciary in India did not possess any real and effective powers to strike down legislation or control or review the powers of the administration.

When India's Constitution was being drafted, the cabal at the helm of putting the constitution together expressed their fear of a powerful judiciary in no uncertain terms, with T.T. Krishnamachari straying into denigrating hyperbole when he called it (even the disempowered version of the judiciary envisaged by the Constitution) a 'Frankenstein monster'. The argument of fear prevailed.

The Constitution-makers denied the judiciary the power to impose 'due process' judicial standards on the administration and legislature. The judges were given the same power as those in England on the understanding that the judiciary of the United Kingdom was generally conservative and forbearing in the use of its powers. The Constitution of India as it was promulgated in 1950 was strongly founded on the intuition that the judiciary was generally not to be trusted.

**C**onservative expectations from the judiciary suited Nehru and his incoming government. Inspired by a mixture of Fabian socialism drawn from England, planning from the Soviet Union, regulatory 'New Deal' mechanisms from America and with full faith in the British inherited civil service, Nehru wanted to plan India's future by creating a huge regulatory and welfare state through the rule of law to create a viable technological infrastructure to enable economic growth whilst simultaneously transforming the social lives of the people

so that they could face the challenge of modernity without losing their past.

This mix of law and state (which in retrospect smacks of 'naive instrumentalism') did not give the judiciary too significant or creative a role. It was for Parliament to enact laws which would empower and enable change, for bureaucracy to instrument the change into effect, and for the judges to enable this empowerment in a non-obstructive manner. No less interested in change, the judges refused to be silent spectators. When they sought to bring in more equitable compensation in the zamindari abolition and land reform cases, they were confronted with amendments to the Constitution and were, in turn accused by Nehru of having purloined the Constitution.

**A**ll this is too well known to merit repetition. What survives for emphasis is the fact that social and political expectations of the judiciary in the fifties and sixties were that it should not stand in the way of progress – a view to which the judges demurred, claiming that they were sadly misunderstood.

Over the years, the judiciary responded to these political expectations in three distinct ways. First, to ward off the voodoo of the uncomfortable accusation that they were anti-national, the judges made it clear that – to borrow Justice Krishna Iyer's words – 'in the inevitable chemistry of social change, judges are certainly not anti-catalysts.' Second, a planning commission jurisprudence was born at the hands of strong judges like Chief Justice Gajendragadkar who exhorted the judiciary to use law for the purpose of social engineering.

The third response flowed from the second and promised 'committed' judges to the nation. But, it did not take long for the formula of 'committed' judges to mean 'regime' judges, result-

ing in the quip that some lawyers and judges know the law and some only need to know the law minister!

**P**olitical expectations of the judiciary were not the only expectations of the judiciary. A powerful constitutional arena can never work to measure. The agenda of the judiciary is not determined by the judges, but also by lawyers and litigants who file cases before the judiciary. In the dynamic that follows, many further expectations arise in the minds of the litigants, lawyers and, perforce, the judges themselves. It did not take long for Indian judges to realise that the judiciary was an institution of state in its own right which would be supported by lawyers, litigants and powerful forces who saw a duly empowered judiciary as a permanent self-standing arena to fight the government.

On their part, the judges were simply not prepared to be seen as falling below cosmopolitan standards of judicial review of the actions of the legislative and executive, even if among the judges themselves there were strong and 'weak' versions of the scope of such a review. It is the 'strong' version of judicial review (as manifested by Justices Fazl Ali, Mahajan, Mukerjea and Das in the fifties; Justice Subba Rao, Hidayatullah, Shah and Hegde in the sixties; Justice Krishna Iyer, Bhagwati, Chinappa Reddy and Desai in the eighties; Justice Venkatachaliah, Kuldeep Singh and Verma in the nineties) that have rung alarm bells in political circles and excited public controversy.

This is not to say that 'weak' versions of judicial review do not entail strong oversight of government. Although the judges faltered hopelessly during the Emergency (1975-77), and were accused of not just forbearance but cowardice for their performance during that period, even the normal

incidence of judicial review has been quite exacting. In that sense, irrespective of whether individual judges at various times have followed 'strong' or 'weak' versions of judicial review, they have set up the judiciary as a powerful and effective institution – a new forum in which private and public issues can be agitated.

In this configuration, it was no longer exclusively necessary for the Indian people to tout favours from honest or corrupt politicians and bureaucrats (which according to the Vohra Committee published in 1995 had become the normal method of doing business with the government and interrogating its power). Armed with law, the discontented could use the judiciary and place it in institutional polarity to the government.

**E**mbarrassed by their record during the Emergency, but greatly emboldened by their own impressive track record, the judiciary has slowly expanded the scope of judicial review. Although inspired by native institutions, the early breakthrough of the fifties and sixties were based on an imitative cosmopolitanism, inspired by judicial innovations in administrative law in England.

In the mid-sixties, Lord Reid and Lord Denning in England transformed judicial attitudes to the administration. India followed suit. But true creativity cannot just be derived from imitation. In many of the significant areas of judicial resistance – of which the most celebrated is the Fundamental Rights case (1973) where the Supreme Court told Parliament that the basic structure of the Constitution was inviolate from constitutional amendment – the Indian judiciary has set a pattern for other judiciaries of the world to follow.

As we review the history of the Supreme Court of India, it might not

be impertinent to note that much of the real innovative stuff has come from 'Indian' as opposed to 'western' educated judges. Controversial judgments have flowed from the judicial pen of a Justice Mahajan, Patanjali Sastri, Gajendragadkar, Krishna Iyer or Bhagwati who were solely educated in India and who were, perhaps, less enamoured and more practical in dealing with the English legal traditions which Indian law is heir to.

**T**he quantum juristic leap made by the Supreme Court came after the Emergency. Although associated with the work of a group of judges whom I affectionately call the 'gang of four' (comprising of Justice Krishna Iyer, Bhagwati, Chinappa Reddy and D.A. Desai), the vision for the change should be attributed to Justice Krishna Iyer.

A former politician, Justice Krishna Iyer instinctively knew that the days of 'naive instrumentalism' and 'committed judges' were over; and the judges had to take a decision about making the judiciary an *institution of governance* which served the Indian people to resolve Indian problems in an effective way. Carefully choosing the issues on which this change would be based, the new public interest law (PIL) movement was born.

Certain salient features of the new PIL should be noted. In the first place, it congealed an *invitation to democratic participation* to determine the agenda of the judiciary. Any bona fide public interest person or group could invoke the court's jurisdiction, albeit by writing a letter, with the judges reserving the power to examine any issue which had public implications, even if brought to their notice by the newspapers. But, who did all this provide an opportunity for? Surely not the general populace? Perhaps, for ambitious social activists

and lawyers who saw in this an opportunity to carve out a social niche for themselves.

Second, the new PIL was founded on a *new conception of social and economic justice* so that the poor and disadvantaged should not be just otherwise neglected beneficiaries of the Rawlsian 'difference principle', but protected from physical and economic deprivation and atrocity and put on the road to genuine equal opportunity and self-advancement. In time, this conception of social justice did not just confine itself to the disadvantaged, but more generally with the public interest, including issues concerning the environment, general corruption and the conduct of the administration.

**T**hird, the new PIL was *pre-eminently exploratory* in its procedure and geared towards an *efficacy of results*. The court devised new procedures of appointing fact-finding and expert commissions to apprise itself of the issues before it. It also created schematic remedies so that commissions and other enforcement mechanisms indicated by the courts could ensure that the relief granted by them was implemented. It is a moot question as to whether these new procedures and schematic remedies were, in fact, balanced and effective in their approach.

It was not surprising that the new PIL encountered critics both within and without the courts. Within the court, the judges were concerned that a public interest litigation was becoming a publicity interest litigation, with the public cause being fueled by private interests. Many judges were simply not willing to go along with the new PIL, forcing the court to re-examine its scope—an exercise which is still not complete.

By the early nineties, most activists had good cause to believe that less imaginative judges had straight jack-

eted PIL into conservative proportions. It was around this period that Indian governance took a turn for the worse. By 1992, the Vohra Committee had already concluded that India was in the hand of hoodlums at every level of administration. Operations in Punjab, Kashmir and the North East and elsewhere had resulted in levels of atrocity that were unconscionable. Nuns were raped in Uttar Pradesh and judges beaten up in Nadiad (Gujarat) without effective official action being taken. Led by Chief Justice Venkatachaliah, the court monitored these changes.

As the environment worsened, Justice Kuldeep Singh's *tour de force* in protecting the Taj, Delhi and various other areas became household news. Justice Verma's monitoring the hawala case against leading politicians showed that the judges were not willing to sit back and watch the subversion of the rule of law. As if to illustrate the point, Justice Verma also delivered the Babri Masjid and Hindutva judgments; and, more generally took the view that the judiciary should not be too interfering by venturing into areas and issues which were not judicially manageable.

Ironically, it was his orders in the Forest and Vehicular Pollution cases which led some critics to ask whether Justice Verma and his colleagues had crossed the *Lakshman rekha* of judicial propriety to take over the administration. Or, was it the case that the judges were simply ensuring that the administration did what it was supposed to under the law?

**W**e need not trouble ourselves with every twist and turn of contemporary controversies about the judiciary. A great deal of it is motivated by vested interests who have been hurt by judicial orders. Some of it is media hype, anxiously trying to catch

high profile stories and making issues more controversial in order to attain that profile.

But, general public concern about whether judges can be trusted with so much power without an appropriate framework of accountability cannot simply be wished away without further examination. The concern pivots around the circumstance that judges are neither democratically elected nor structurally accountable for their decisions. This concern deepens in the light of an exponential growth of *personality based judicial decision-making*, with the law being developed by particular judges amidst dissent by others.

**A**re judges accountable? If so, in what way? And, to whom? In considering this, we can make a distinction between *primary* and *secondary* accountability, primary responsibility being affixed, in this context, on those who create the law and not those who simply interpret it. There is also a decision to be made between *structural democratic* accountability (which requires the decision-maker to account to some other, preferably democratic, fora in respect of its decision-making) and *value* accountability where the decision-maker claims to give effect to certain inalienable (even if controversial) universally respected (even if not accepted) values identified with a civilized society.

By its very nature, the modern political concept of law reposes law-making in the hands of the political sovereign—be it a democratic legislature or a dictator. It is on this basis that judges seek to escape from the burden of primary responsibility by asserting that much of modern law is not made, but simply interpreted, by them.

Though some of the laws in India—such as tort law or personal laws

— continue to be judge-made, it is by and large true that the law and rule creation function has comprehensively moved towards and falls within the domain of the legislature and the executive. But, in hiding behind their so-called interpretative function and claiming only secondary accountability for their decision-making, lawyers and judges are being crafty rather than coy.

**E**ven while interpreting law within the interstices prescribed by the legislature, *judges do make law*. Every hermeneutic discipline (including theology or literary or art criticism) gives a great deal of scope to the 'interpreter' to be creative. The so-called rules of interpretation are themselves a social and political compromise to discipline interpretation without stifling it. Even secondary accountability carries with it the duty to be accountable.

Given a system in which the executive appoints judges on the advice of the judiciary (a system that does not always work well in India) and the huge discretionary powers which Indian judges have commandeered to their use, judges cannot escape the duty to be both primarily and secondarily accountable for their decision-making.

How do unelected judges with virtually life-long working tenures account for their judicial conduct? To say that they are appointed by a democratically accountable executive can only spawn incredulity as an effective answer. Judges cannot be democratically accountable in the same sense as elected legislature and executives, although there are various judicial systems which ordain elections, with indifferent and unconvincing results. Introducing a system of elected judicial appointments in India will kill the judiciary as an institution. We have only to witness what has taken place

not just in elections to legislatures, but also in elections to Bar Councils and Bar Associations to confirm any doubts that we may have of such a foolhardy prescription.

But, there is considerable room for the argument that the method of appointing judges in India can be vastly improved. In the two judgments that dealt with the issue in 1982 and 1993, the argument was almost solely about who should have the decisive say in making appointments to the judiciary: the executive or the judges? The awkward formula of making the Chief Justice of India's voice decisive in the matter of appointments may have resulted in concentrating too much power in one person. *There is a great need to evolve a judicial collegiate which would consider and make judicial appointments*. Several proposals in this regard have been put forward, but they have not come to fruition; nor even seriously considered.

**L**inked to the question of appointments is the problem of discipline and removal. During and after the Ramaswami affair (1991-94) when Parliament refused to confirm findings of a judicial committee by not voting in favour of impeachment, the Supreme Court evolved several informal mechanisms to deal with errant judges, including those accused of waywardness and corruption. One such important mechanism for High Court judges was to transfer them to other High Courts. While—at least, to me—it is abhorrent that High Court judges can be transferred like civil servants, the policy was used effectively in the nineties to 'clean up' many High Courts. Such informal mechanisms were used to deny Justice Ramaswami 'work' whilst impeachment proceedings were under way.

The informal mechanism route was also suggested in the latest

controversy over Justice Punchi and almost put into effect. It was subsequently withdrawn because of strong opposition from the Bar. It felt that strong informal mechanisms which prejudged the guilt of judges were usurpatory in nature and unfair to judges who must be presumed to be innocent like anyone else.

**T**he Bar and the judiciary in India is often factionally divided resulting in all kinds of untimely and doubtful accusations. Yet, there is reason to believe that the higher judiciary is not free from corruption and indiscipline. That is why *it is necessary to evolve mechanisms to deal with judicial indiscipline and corruption*. Most countries in the world have formally created such procedures to deal with judicial discipline and misconduct. There are even greater reasons for India to take urgent steps to ensure that its judiciary is above suspicion.

There remains the problem of judicial accountability for judicial decision-making. Such accountability can only be value based. The form in which this is expressed is to declare that *judges are accountable to the law*. The seeming contradiction in this defense of the judiciary is its circularity, in that judges claim to be accountable to a body of law which is of their own making. This is no doubt partly true.

But, judicial creativity is not unbounded. It is not just based on following rules, but in devising principles and values including those relating to human rights and justice. To the extent to which all discourse and disciplines are malleable, there will always be a wide judicial discretion to interpret and apply laws in any particular situation.

Be that as it may, what has to be borne in mind is that the judicial func-

tion contains within itself many safeguards which ensure accountability. All matters are decided after hearing the parties on the basis of rigorously laid down procedures. When the judges take a decision, they are obliged to give detailed reasons for their decision. Accountability of an exacting order is inbuilt into these procedures. Judges do make mistakes. Those who have the power to decide may err. Susceptibility to making mistakes in an otherwise closely monitored process cannot by itself affirm lack of accountability.

In order to evaluate the role of the judiciary in a democracy, an overview has to be taken of the evolution of various structures of political democracy over the past two hundred odd years. There is an inevitable tension between *majoritarian* principles (which require the will of the majority or the greatest good of the greatest number to be given effect to) and *value based* justice principles (which seek to immunize certain human values from the tyranny of majoritarianism).

If this tension did not exist, much of what is of value to governance would be lost with holocaustic results. While the need to recognise this tension has been accepted, it is not entirely clear how it would be given effect to. Most of the answers to keeping political rulers in check lie in civil society. But, civil society is not *sui generis*, containing as it does the awesome capacity to inflict majoritarian pressures and values on one and all.

The need for institutions of governance which will defend value based justice from the onslaught of majoritarianism has been deeply felt in this century which has seen two world wars, genocide and poverty on a scale that is unprecedented and has no parallel. Democracy is not, and

cannot be, wholly free in the pursuit of ends which subvert democracy itself. The judiciary was not a natural candidate to be an institution of governance which would monitor and find the balance between democracy and justice. Its track record was suspect, its affiliations class biased, and its decision making unpredictable.

But, over this century, it has improved its candidature for being the institutional guardian of value based justice. This is as true of India's judiciary as of other judiciaries around the world. No doubt, the performance of the judiciary has been uneven. But even after close scrutiny, it seems to come out ahead as an important institution of governance to help democracy find its strengths. It is on this basis that the judiciary justifies its new found pre-eminence as a unique institution of governance.

We should not be too disturbed by the new efflux of controversies about the Indian judiciary. Throughout its 47 years of existence the Supreme Court has always been controversial. In the fifties and sixties, an angry Nehru accused the judiciary of being socially irresponsible. Unable to cope with or understand judicial power, Indira Gandhi superseded judges in their claim to be Chief Justices of India on two occasions in the seventies and took several unsuccessful measures to curb the jurisdiction and power of the judiciary.

The judicial creation of PIL was always controversial. Sometimes – to invoke a distinction made by a Allahabad High Court judge – the judiciary was not controversial but simply got caught in controversies. But, real differences have also existed between judges and politicians; and the judiciary on its part (while permitting criticism of its work) has reacted sharply and punished politicians

who have suggested that the judges are class biased.

Yet, we have to recognise the transformation of the judiciary into a new and unique institution of Indian governance. From being a mere bureaucracy and an institution of state, it has become a self-standing institution of governance in its own right. At times, it has seemed a mere bureaucracy. For the British and Nehru, it was simply another important constitutional institution of governance. Given contemporary developments and India's plight these new developments, which have given the judiciary an increasingly important role as an institution of governance, are both necessary and proper.

Having created such an important institution of governance, India must be careful that the judiciary does not fall by the wayside as have many others throughout the world. The Malaysian crisis of the eighties was a reminder of what can happen to even a mildly courageous judiciary. If further proof is needed of a possible portentous state of things to come, the utter destruction of the power, status and prestige of the judiciary of Pakistan in late 1997 must give us pause.

Judges are aware that institutions of governance rest on a measure of public goodwill and political support. They know that they must be statesmanlike in the exercise of power. So far the Indian judiciary has combined wisdom with craft and courage. But, it has also shown itself to be erratic, personality based and not above suspicion.

As India's million mutinies creep up on the judiciary and cry out for a rule of law, the judges need to be careful. Indian governance, too, must realise that the judiciary is a fragile democratic gift. It must be subjected to criticism but never irresponsibly.



# Education and its market value

DINESH MOHAN

A FEW weeks ago I ran into an old friend who is currently one of the mandarins deciding India's economic and financial policies. He asked, 'And so, how is IIT doing?' As one can only indulge in friendly banter at such gatherings, I responded with 'Not so well actually. Your market-friendly policies have forced us to raise the fee, so we have 50% fewer Ph.D. applicants this year.' Not batting an eyelid, he shot back: 'Obviously. Your Ph.D. students don't have any market value.' Taken aback, I shifted to a more serious tone and tried to start a discussion on the need for research in these globalised times. But he had already walked away. The last word on the imperatives of the 'market' had been spoken.

Actually, this view of higher education should not have surprised me. Worthies who look at everything as consumer products classify higher education as a 'non-merit' good. Non-merit goods are those where only the individual benefits from acquiring them and not the society as a whole. Multilateral agencies like The World Bank have too been pushing countries like India to stop subsidies to higher education.

When Ron Brown, former US commerce secretary visited India, a

public meeting was organized at IIT Delhi. At that meeting I asked him: 'I understand that since the 19th century all the way up to the 1970s, most land grant and state universities in the US virtually provided free education to state citizens. Was that good for the economy, or should they have charged high fees in the early 20th century?' He replied, 'It was great for the economy. It was one of the best things that the US government did at that particular time in American history – building institutions of higher education which were accessible to the masses of the people. I think it is one of the reasons why our economy grew and prospered, one of the ways in which the US was able to close some of its social gaps. So people who lived in rural areas would have the same kind of access to higher education as people living in other parts of the country. It was one of the reasons for making America strong.'

Our policy-makers seem unaware that their mentors in the US did not follow policies at home which they now prescribe for other countries. Ron Brown's remarks summarize the importance policy-makers in the US place on higher education as a vehicle for upward mobility for the poorer sectors of their population.

81

Even today, a majority of Americans study in state-run institutions. Some of these institutions, like Berkeley and the Universities of Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Texas are among the best in the world. The annual tuition charged from state residents (about \$5000 a year) is about a month's salary paid to a lecturer. Even this fee is waived for most students. In addition, students receive stipends for books, food and hostel charges. The basic principle is that no student who gets admission to a university should have to depend on parental support if it is not available.

Ron Brown's remarks went unnoticed in India. Every other day some luminary or the other opines that universities and technical education institutions should increase their charges and that such education should not be subsidized. Most editorials echo these sentiments. Eminent industrialists pontificate that we should run educational institutions like business houses. Visiting experts from the Bank and the IMF, in their newly emerging concern for the poor, advise us to divert funds from higher education to primary education.

**M**any of these arguments and suggestions are not only ill-informed and spurious but may even be mischievous. If we change our policies on such advice, we could end up destroying our technical expertise without managing to develop a vibrant and equitable school system. Without the availability of technical expertise in the country the question of 'competing globally' does not arise.

There are three sets of people most vociferous in demanding that we make education more expensive. The first comprise those who obtained the best education in India almost free, an education which enabled them to secure scholarships to the best univer-

sities abroad for postgraduate studies. They went on to join organizations like The World Bank, the UN, or multinational corporations, and have subsequently returned to India after accumulating substantial savings abroad. These resident NRIs now occupy influential positions in the Indian bureaucracy and corporate world. Many of them send their children abroad for university education, and the state of Indian institutions does not really concern them. This is why they can afford the position that children of middle class parents in India should not be subsidized for their university education. From a position of comfort they push their ideologies promoting free enterprise while showing 'concern' for the poor at the same time!

**T**he second set consists of those extremely well-off by our standards, but who find it difficult to get their children admitted to good colleges and institutions in India, possibly because there has been little growth in the number of good colleges in the country after the mid-70s. Simultaneously, competition for admission has increased because of the growth in numbers of the so called 'middle class' population. Since securing admission into a prestigious institution is difficult, increasing the cost of education is one way to 'reserve' some seats for rich children with less 'merit'.

The third includes middle class parents with children in capitation fee colleges. These parents end up using all their savings (including withdrawals from their provident fund) and often take loans from banks and relatives to provide their children a second-rate college education. Deprived of all their savings, these parents are a disgruntled lot, jealous of others whose children have obtained a better education at a much lower cost in

government-run institutions. They would like everyone to suffer like them.

Though the underlying reasons for supporting an increase in the cost of higher education are different for the three groups, all of them provide a similar rationale in defense of their arguments. They couch them in a language and logic that pretends to show concern for promoting greater equity in society by taxing the rich. But one must examine these arguments carefully because in other arenas of life these very people oppose progressive taxation or the establishment of a welfare state.

Let us consider these arguments. The most disingenuous one, couched in a concern for the poor, goes something like this. 'The students in our best colleges come from rich families and therefore should not be subsidized. They should pay fees that are higher than what they paid in school.' It is easy to get swayed by this pseudo logic. Only the top one percentile of the country's families may be comfortable with the expenses involved in sending children to private schools. A typical professional family in India does not have a disposable income of more than Rs 7,000 to 8,000 a month in the first 10 years of work.

**A** good school costs at least Rs 500 to 1,000 a month per child. Sending two children to school is a heavy financial burden, and most families spend a little more than what they can actually afford. Since this leaves them without savings for later years, they actually look forward to the day when their wards can get admission to a university where the fee is lower. That would be the time when they start saving for their retirement years, if they are lucky.

The main issue is not whether the rich should pay higher fees or not. The questions that need to be asked

are: Why do only the rich gain admission to our best institutions regardless of merit? What can we do to make sure that intelligent young people from lower income families also get an opportunity to study in the best institutions? Destroying our system of education by designing it for the paying capabilities of the top one per cent of Indian families is hardly an answer.

**W**henever we raise such issues, the usual response is, 'You can always give scholarships to the really deserving.' What this implies is that while all rich children have a right to higher education, only the 'really intelligent' among the less fortunate ones can claim the same right. In any case, even today, more than 95% of our population needs heavy subsidies to access good quality university education. Raising the cost of education would only perpetuate and strengthen the present unfair situation.

The problem, however, is a little more complex. Even with scholarships for the disadvantaged, most of these students would still not make it to good institutions. This is because good schooling in India is now virtually reserved for the important and the rich sections of society. Attending private school or a Kendriya Vidyalaya is no longer adequate to ensure admission to a good institution. Expensive private tuition and coaching classes too need to be arranged. So, as things stand, those from the lower middle classes and the poor have little chance of making it to a good institution.

Even the really outstanding students from poor families are discouraged by their parents from attending 'elite' academic institutions because of the high cost associated with hostel fees, food and books. The American, European and Japanese experience suggests that if we want the lower middle and working classes to aspire

to elite institutions, then these expenditures have to be arranged for. Raising fees and other costs will make it near impossible for the outstanding among the poor to even dream of higher education opportunities.

A second argument advanced is that students in western societies pay high fees. This is patently untrue. Higher education continues to be relatively inexpensive in most countries of western Europe. An exception to this is the UK following changes brought about by recent Thatcherite policies. But even there the fee charged from citizens is only a fraction of their per capita income. In addition, there are a host of private, official and institutional mechanisms that help the deserving. Recently, students protested Labour government plans to introduce £1,000 a year university tuition fee. Even this proposed fee is under 10% of the per capita income in the UK.

**T**he example of high fee most often cited is for the private universities in the US – 'Stanford charges \$20,000, so why should we have cheap education in India? There is no such thing as a free lunch.' These examples are misleading. A majority of Americans obtain good higher education in state institutions and not private ones. For state residents, the official fee charged is about \$4,000 a year which is only 15% of the US per capita income. Not only is this fee not paid by a large proportion of students since they obtain freeships, but many of them manage assistance for living expenses. Even in private institutions like Yale and Harvard, nearly 75% to 90% of postgraduate students do not pay fees out of their own pockets.

In Singapore the official fee in a technical university is about \$5,000 (Singapore). This is only 15% of per capita income. 15% of the per capita income in India amounts to only

Rs 2,000 per year. Therefore, even if we were to charge a higher fee, it should not exceed 15% of our per capita income. We cannot take cues only from the Thatcher and Reagan policies of the past few years, but what their societies did when they were in their own process of 'development' and upward mobility.

**R**eplicating the policies of relatively static, rich, middle class western societies in a poor and hierarchical society like India would be stupid. Increasing the cost of education has many other deleterious effects on society besides denying opportunities to the less advantaged. All societies that are considered 'successful' today, without exception, have provided near free high quality higher education to their deserving young people.

Raising the cost of higher education retards upward mobility. The proportion of Blacks attending university in the US has remained static or even gone down in the last 15 years as the cost of education has increased. This has resulted in greater social tensions and it is not surprising that crime rates in the US and UK are higher than those in western Europe.

Increasing cost of education may result in corrupting the students and skewing their educational choices toward pursuit of fashionable careers. When students need a great deal of money for education, they can obtain it only through loans or from their parents. This pressure could make them more narrow minded, pushing them into disregarding career options that may be commercially less rewarding. They will also be unable to pursue scholarship options which their parents do not approve of. This will result in a mismatch between students' real talents and fields chosen for study. When students spend large

amounts on higher education, the pressure on institutions to graduate them as soon as possible increases and the quality of education suffers. It is a mistaken assumption that fee paying students demand better quality education. All they actually demand is a degree in the shortest possible time. The capitation colleges in our country provide enough empirical evidence for this.

High fee paying students are not likely to show any loyalty to either the institution or society. They view the process of education as a business deal without any sense of social responsibility. In addition, such an arrangement is bound to create social tensions between scholarship holders, loan holders and students funding their own education. Upon graduation, they will be forced to aim for higher paying jobs even if they are unsuitable. This would reduce the probability of graduates going in for teaching jobs, working in NGOs or joining public services occupations.

**T**he medical and legal professions in the US provide a good example of this trend. Medical and law schools in the US have always charged a high fee, unlike other professional institutions. Not surprisingly, these two professions are the most money-minded and the legal and medical systems in the US are considered the worst in all industrialized countries.

Under financial pressure, students cannot risk participating in social movements, thereby reducing the vitality of universities as conscience keepers of society. It is unlikely that students would have participated in our freedom movement had they made large investments in education. The largest and most vociferous anti-war protests in the US came from state-funded universities, not private ones.

If we would like students to work in their areas of interest and competence, they must be financially independent of their parents. Otherwise they cannot really choose their professions. This implies that not only does the fee have to be low but arrangements must be made for young people to fund their living costs as well.

**H**igh cost of education ends up corrupting the parents also. Many individuals are willing to make do without fancy consumer goods to remain honest. But most may bend their morals to gather money for educating their children. Increasingly people take on a second job illegally and neglect their principal job to support their wards in college. Some accept demeaning jobs abroad just to support their children. Others are forced to be even more dishonest.

The lack of savings resulting from expensive school and college education will force society to become corrupt in some form or manner. 'Reforms' of any variety would then be unable to undo this harm. Promoting honesty as a value would become difficult if most parents and their children are forced into corruption due to the high costs of education. No country can aspire to be relatively honest if it makes education expensive for its citizens.

The increasing cost of higher education would affect women adversely. Under today's social mores, most parents would rather spend more on a boy's education than a girl's. Increasing the cost of education would mean losing the gains in levels of women's education, particularly in middle class and lower middle class families. These are the families in which young women need to be encouraged to take up higher education opportunities. Young women wanting to go into professional institutions

would be hit the hardest as these institutions tend to be more expensive.

All modern and successful societies recognize the importance of postgraduate education in general and professional education in particular. This is why postgraduate education is not only free but heavily subsidized for facilities and equipment in all industrialized countries (business schools may be the only exception). Postgraduate students get stipends that are usually 50 to 70% of the value of the salary they would have got in a regular government job. Unless students are given such help, taking up postgraduate studies would be difficult as parents would not want to spend any more money on their children once they are capable of earning a living.

**C**onclusive evidence for this phenomenon is provided by IIT Delhi. The institute raised its annual fee to Rs 25,000 per year for postgraduate students in July 1997. The student intake immediately dropped by 30 to 50% in most departments. This created a serious problem as the intake of postgraduate students has a direct correlation with the quality of the faculty in an institution. The IITs in India are able to attract excellent faculty with Ph.Ds from the best universities in India and abroad because they are able to pursue research careers. If there are no Ph.D. students, these young researchers would not join as faculty. This is clear from the experience of the regional and private engineering colleges in India and elsewhere.

The demand for free and compulsory schooling in India is both just and necessary. We have neglected primary and secondary school education for far too long. This is partly because private schooling is subsidized (cheap land for schools and other benefits) and the rich do not send their children to government schools. As a result

there is little moral or administrative pressure to upgrade the quality of government schools, especially in large cities.

Had we banned the 'public school' system or made it about three times as expensive, government schools would have improved automatically as all the bureaucrats' children would have been students in the latter. The failure to provide a good community school system has resulted in the present impasse. Instead of increasing the resource generation for education at all levels, what is now being proposed is that higher education too should be squeezed and funds transferred to school education. This will make us lose on both counts.

**A**s universities are increasingly starved for resources, their facilities and the learning environment are becoming even more dismal. School teachers are the products of universities. If universities become even more dysfunctional, so will their products – the school teachers. And if university education becomes more expensive, then fewer well-qualified men and women will opt for jobs as school teachers. Those who are forced to do so will extort money from parents under one pretext or another. Clearly, increasing budgetary allocations for school education at the expense of higher education will eventually benefit no one.

We have enough evidence that liberalisation and free-enterprise on their own do not ensure development of good quality institutions of higher learning. The recent economic success of Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia has not resulted in the establishment of universities of excellence. Even Singapore finds it difficult to attract students to its technical postgraduate programmes. Such institutions have to be established con-

sciously, supported by society and a demand created for knowledge generation by appropriate industrial and economic policies. It takes a minimum of two generations to establish traditions and systems that make universities productive, innovative and capable of useful research and development.

**S**ocieties that aspire to compete internationally in the marketplace on a sustained basis must create knowledge to be capable of innovation. This is even more necessary in a world that is increasingly becoming deglobalised as far as technology and consumer goods are concerned. By deglobalisation we mean that there are now many more centres of production compared to half a century ago.

In the pre-independence era all technological goods sold around the world were manufactured in a few countries in Europe and the US. All were of similar design. The buses, trains, and tractors used in India were the same as those used in the UK. However, as our technological capabilities improved we now produce goods at lower cost and with designs different from those used in the richer countries. To improve upon on these technologies we will need to upgrade our scientific and technological skills more than we have in the past.

Along with development of deglobalised technologies we will need to acquire and use truly global technologies as well. For example, computers, cameras, televisions, passenger aircraft and many industrial processes and manufacturing methods. A continental economy like India cannot afford to completely depend on foreign skills and knowledge for the use and maintenance of these products.

Our efficiency and success in the development and use of both global and non-global technologies will depend entirely on the availability

of highly skilled professionals and well educated workers. This is only possible if we make arrangements for universal school education and an expanded university system. The universities can attract bright, motivated and hard working professionals from the middle and lower classes only if higher education is not made expensive. Promoting upward mobility of the lower middle classes and the poor is important. Young people from these strata of society are the ones who form the backbone of professional work in all industrialized societies.

**W**e have already wasted five decades neglecting school education. We have neglected higher education for about two decades and that is why capitation fee colleges have appeared on the scene. This pattern of low quality and expensive education can only destroy our chances of future development and technological advancement. The policy-makers in industrialized societies will discourage us from developing our own technological and scientific skills. They are afraid of the success of countries like Japan, China and South Korea. They will do anything in their power to make sure that India too does not become as competitive.

With great difficulty we have established a reasonable infrastructure for higher education over the past 50 years. This needs to be strengthened and improved. This will be possible only if the school system is improved along with increased allocation of resources for higher education. If we make higher education more expensive for students, we will destroy all we have achieved up to now. It is quite clear that we need much higher societal funding, both for school and university education. This cannot be done by drastically increasing charges.

# From Bombay to Mumbai

RAJDEEP SARDESAI

'Farewell, farewell to Alexandria as she is leaving...'

— C.P. Cavafy

BOMBAY was once an ethos, a state of the modern Indian mind, a byword for urban hope. But today we must say goodbye to received notions of the Bombay that was, the Bombay of Guru Dutt and J.R.D. Tata, Frank Moraes and Sahir Ludhianvi because the dream city on the western seaboard where the commerce was good and the poetry even better, is no more. Old Bombay with its genteel elitism and vibrant cosmopolitanism has died and we must sing its requiem.

Cities, like great empires, do rise and fall, the cycle of history condemns all metropolises to eventual decline. The Patna of today, for example, would scarcely be reminiscent of the ancient city of Patliputra, capital to the glorious empires of the past. Nor would a decaying Benaras compare with the crucible of high Indo-

Gangetic civilisation that it once was. The difference though is that the transition from Ashoka's dharma to Laloo's raj or from high Hindu culture to consumer piety, has been slow and gradual. Bombay's decline has been precipitous, encapsulated in two decades that have replaced its cosmopolitan ideal with a new cultural mantra that revolves around chauvinism, criminalisation and crass commercialism.

Today, Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena rule Mantralaya, their power based on the language of coercion and intimidation. No dissent is tolerated, no one dare question the *firman* of the supremo. When the editor of Maharashtra's most widely read daily, Lok Satta recently chose to criticise the Sena chief's remote control politics, he was threatened and warned that he would be beaten to pulp. Tenants who refuse to vacate precious real estate have been virtually pushed out by the footsoldiers of

the Sena army. The fact that most of these tenants happen to be middle class Maharashtrians, once the backbone of the Sena, scarcely matters. Nativism has been easily sacrificed at the altar of mammon.

Thackeray is not the only extra-constitutional authority lording over the city. Dubai is closer than Delhi is to Bombay. So, while an effete state in Lutyensland procrastinates, a former constable's son turned underworld don, Dawood Ibrahim runs his own sideshow from across the Arabian Sea. Extortions, hired killings (*supari* in local parlance), drug cartels and construction businesses, the D. Company has parcelled out Bombay among various ganglords. The killing of music baron, Gulshan Kumar in a crowded area only reflects the growing brazenness with which the gangs of Bombay conduct their operation.

In a sense, Dawoodbhai is the flip side of the Sena goons. The former uses gun power and street muscle to get his way. The latter uses state power and official sanction to get things done. Together they highlight the most dangerous trend in Bombay today: the merger of the parallel machinery with a lumpenised state.

Where did it all go so wrong? In the 1950s and '60s, the images of Bombay were defined by the Hindi film industry. As Raj Kapoor and Nargis danced and sang along the broad sidewalks of the Queens Necklace, there was a sense of liberation, a feeling that Bombay at last offered some relief from the stifling traditionalism of other Indian cities. It was an age of innocence, a belief that better times were just around the corner. To hear Johnny Walker croon in CID, *Ai dil hai mushkil jina yahan, jara hatke, jara bachke, yeh hai Bombay meri jan*, was to live the ultimate Indian dream. Bombay, with its entrepre-

neurial zeal and liberal ethos, was seen as the land of opportunity, a happy urban mirror to the future of a nascent nation.

Popular culture, in some ways, still defines the cityscape, only now it is the sound of gunfire in blood-spattered shoot-outs in crowded streets that has replaced the melodies of an earlier era. The innocence is gone, to be replaced by the rage and cynicism of a rootless population, best exemplified in Mani Ratnam's Bombay, a film on the post-Babri Masjid rioting in the city.

Those riots in 1992-93 that claimed over 1000 lives drove the final nail in Bombay's cosmopolitan myth. The violence of that horrific period brought together the various elements that had conspired to end the Bombay dream. The pent-up anger that lay under the surface of the so-called city of gold was finally released and its intensity consumed an entire population. The slumlords, the gangsters, the corrupt and communal politicians, the disillusioned middle class and a resentful underclass, were all guilty of being directly, or indirectly, involved in the carnage.

The riots then were only a culmination of a process of degeneration and loss of identity that had begun to manifest itself in the late 1960s. It is no coincidence that this is the time around which the Shiv Sena emerged as a political entity. The rise of the Sena is often attributed to the machinations of the Congress, considerations of realpolitik prompting the then Congress leadership to promote a force to counter the left unions. But its emergence also reflected a deeper social change taking place in Bombay. As descriptions of the early Sena rallies would suggest, a majority of those in attendance were middle class, white-collar Maharashtrians. The support for the anti-migrant politics of

the Sena mirrored the gradual alienation of the Maharashtrian middle class from the city.

Bombay has always been a city of migrants: the idea of *urbs prima in Indis* reinforced this. But by the '60s, as the in-migration increased, the sense of somehow losing one's identity reached a crisis point for the middle class Maharashtrian. This social group had provided a solid intellectual base to the city; even as the Gujaratis and Parsis had ensured that its productive capital was enhanced. The identity crisis faced by the Maharashtrian middle class has still not been resolved. Beyond a point, the Shiv Sena could never provide a coherent identity since it offered little beyond sloganeering and populist gestures like getting shopkeepers to rename their establishments in Marathi, or agitating to have an airport named after Shivaji.

If the Sena accelerated community divisions in Bombay, the economic cleavages were heightened further in the 1970s and '80s. It was in the early '70s that the then chief minister of Maharashtra, Vasantrao Naik, began his grand reclamation project. Naik was among the first to realise that real estate was Bombay's most precious equity. He began a tradition of politicians in tandem with builders wheeling and dealing in large construction projects. The Urban Land Ceiling Act provisions in 1976 only gave a boost to such underhand dealings. Scarce land, skyrocketing prices: the deadly combination changed Bombay's landscape. Proper housing became the privilege of a small elite with the so-called government housing board schemes collapsing. Granting additional floor space index and slum regularisation were high profit, low-risk ventures for the politician-builder nexus. Today, the nexus still flour-

ishes, by selling mill land in prime property or building large complexes in Bombay's satellite towns.

Even as the battle for scarce land intensified, there was little attention paid to infrastructure and the notion of urban renewal. Schemes to reduce traffic congestion, to create a green belt, to rationalise real estate prices, have never really taken off. Most importantly, the entire slum redevelopment project has been hijacked by the politician-builder lobby. When it came to power, the Shiv Sena promised that 40 lakh slum dwellers would get proper tenements. Under the scheme, builders would be given additional floor space index (FSI) for participating in slum redevelopment. Today, the grand project has only resulted in a few slum demolitions but no attempt at redevelopment.

**T**he fact is that in the last 20 years, with in-migration persisting, Bombay's slum population has grown relentlessly. Today, around 60 per cent of Bombay's population lives in make-shift slums, in conditions that are often unliveable. This footloose proletariat has no real stake in Bombay's future because the city is seen to have done little for them. Their anger is, in a sense, the counterpoint to the disillusionment of the middle class.

The social and economic crisis was aggravated in the 1980s during the long textile strike. When the strike failed in 1985 and over 75,000 workers were rendered jobless, an integral part of the city's economic backbone was broken. The working class of the textile unions of central Mumbai had resisted the rise of lumpenism and had supported the likes of S.A. Dange and George Fernandes in parliamentary elections in the 1960s. That today Fernandes has switched his loyalties to Bihar and is allied to the BJP, even while gangster Arun Gawli rules what

ever remains of mill land Mumbai's unions, is a sign of the increasingly dysfunctional nature of Bombay's political economy.

**T**oday, the textile looms have been gradually displaced by the computers of multinational banks, a reflection of how Bombay's economy is almost entirely service sector oriented. Lower Parel in central Mumbai has been rechristened Upper Worli, an upmarket business area populated by the likes of Citibank and Lintas. The labour class character of Bombay has totally disappeared, creating a further loss of identity. The bright lights of Nariman Point, where young executives can rattle off the trading figures on Wall street and Dalal street with equal dexterity, may be a pointer to a boundaryless India Inc., but they certainly haven't been able to give the city a distinctive ethos.

And so, as we push towards a new millenium, its goodbye Bombay and *namaste* Mumbai. Once first generation professional couples held hands and ate *pani-puri* along the balloon-fringed promenade of the sea; once literary soirees uncovered talented young artists and poets; once glitz and gamour glittered on Marine Drive and cafe drinkers raised a toast to urban camaraderie. Now overmade-up power seekers jostle at Chief Minister Manohar Joshi's birthday bash, anxious for a place under the Sena sun and the seamy underbelly of glamour is all too obvious in the blood spattered photos of Bollywood deaths. And even the grand *maidans*, once home to cricket – the city's pride and joy – are today overrun by encroachments. There is an ideological vacuum as the city's famous skyline recedes from vision, leaving in its place an overpopulated, squalid, sweating conglomeration of humanity, its spirit diminished, its soul legislated away.



# Crossing over

SARA RAI

I CANNOT say that my relationship with Allahabad, the town where I spent the first sixteen years of my life, was other than a tenuous one. Allahabad merely provided the outer shell to the kernel, if indeed our house on Drummond Road could be called that. The town seemed to exist simply as an extension of the space in which we spent our unhurried, unchanging days. The past has been called another country but the Allahabad of the past that I remember, sometimes unreliably, seems almost as familiar to me today as it was then. The relentless and dry summer months that changed into steamy monsoons moistening our skins as with warm breath; the short, delightful winter months with their rapid elision into the melancholy I always associated with *basant* or spring in Allahabad.

But apart from the cycle of seasons, the town itself has not changed much either, at least not in a purely physical sense. Certain traditions have died out and some new ones have taken their place, but the map of Allahabad is more or less the same. Give or take a few new shops and houses, some more cars on the road and a visible growth in population, the place would be once again in the sixties, caught, it could seem, in a time warp.

Drummond Road continues to be one of the most neglected and badly lighted roads of the town even though it is adjacent to Hastings Road on which the Circuit House is situated. Back in the sixties, it was little more than a dirt track aspiring to be called a road. There were perhaps five bungalows along the length of it on one side and ours was the second last. At night

a single yellow bulb glimmered at one end of the lane in a brave struggle against the pervading darkness, till it fused or got stolen. Tall grass sprang up on both sides of the desolate road in the rains, housing creatures of the insect and reptile world defying description.

**B**eyond the house immediately to our right was a deep nallah whose furrowed sides were composed entirely of the town's garbage. This was the place where the town supposedly ended. The Municipal Corporation transported the garbage there in monstrous trucks, hoping thus to reclaim some more land for the town. In fact it succeeded in doing this years later, the patch of land thus reclaimed being the present site of Allahabad's television tower. In those days, however, beyond this point stretched a dry wilderness tapering on to the *kachhar* leading to the Ganga. Whole families of swine lived on this stretch. Sometimes they set up a dreadful racket. We learnt later that this was because certain traders in swine cut their bristles to make brushes and other items. The pigs were often butchered and eaten too. This seemed shocking to us, immured as we were from violence of any kind.

When we sat on the roof of our house at night and looked out to the *kachhar*, we could see nothing but blackness. It could have been the edge of the world. It could have been the sea, or indeed, anything else that you imagined it to be. I always thought of it as the sea. Perilous waters in which razor sharp rocks lay just below the surface and eagles watched from lonely crags ships setting sail for distant destinations. The people who lived in my world by day were quite different from its nocturnal inhabitants. At night, witches with long hair and saliva dribbling mouths sat on midnight blue neem trees with legs

dangling down to the ground. There were jackals and civet cats and occasionally the odd jinn, who was, more often than not, a friendly ghost. Night came on suddenly and increased the size of the leaves on trees.

By day this world reorganized itself and took the shape once more of the tidy bungalow with orchards and gardens and familiar people. My father was often busy tapping away with his small hammer making pinewood frames for the paintings that were his current passion. There were times when he painted obsessively, right through the day, his studio littered with palettes, knives, brushes and bottles of linseed and turpentine oil. My mother spent half the day singing. She loved Hindustani classical music and had found her voice almost by accident as a child, when she and her friends took turns at singing into a *ghara* or earthen pot, just for fun. We children, for the most part, were left alone to do what we liked. This could mean flying kites, bathing in the pond under the mango tree, or collecting *birbahuti*, the small red velvet insects that could be seen crawling everywhere in the rains. Those insects have disappeared long since, as have many other things of those days. My sister and I sometimes trailed our brothers giving decent burials to squirrels and sparrows that they had brought down with their slings.

**O**nce in a while my father drove us to the Civil Lines for ice cream at Kwaliti in our sky blue Studebaker. The Studebaker had a long body and when it was started up, the engine sounded like an aeroplane. Dry leaves fluttered up behind the car under the onslaught of air that gushed out of the exhaust pipe and we waited expectantly for the machine to take off. My sister and I enjoyed the crackling sound our hair made as it stuck and

unstuck itself on the nylon material of the back seat when we moved our heads. The waiters in Kwaliti wore spotless white uniforms with red turbans and spoke in inaudible, refined tones. The Civil Lines then was two or three rows of shops, some offices and a restaurant or two. Guzder's, with its graceful lawns, occupied a prominent place. The gentry of the town went there in the evening for a drink and that was where my father offered me my first glass of beer at the age of eight. It was wonderfully frothy and bitter.

**W**e had to leave the house for school at eight thirty. We usually went to school by rickshaw, the latter having been hired for us on a monthly basis. The rickshaw-walla's teeth protruded and gave him a perpetually smiling expression. The road to school was flanked on both sides by ancient tamarind trees. We often stopped the rickshaw to hurl stones at the succulent tamarinds that swung just out of reach. This inevitably ended in a 'who can throw stones the highest' competition and made us late for school. Ours was a convent school and the nuns enforced strict discipline. You could have heard a pin drop in the corridors when the school was in full swing. What we dreaded most was bumping into Mother Joanna at the gate. She had an acid tongue and a pointed umbrella that she used as a weapon for the chastisement of recalcitrant students. We breathed a sigh of relief on the days we managed to get safely past this sentinel.

Classes were a routine affair with lots of written work in which commas and full stops were dictated to us. Poems had to be learnt by heart and recited in an appropriately 'sing-song' voice. Sometimes we had to parse lines of poems or whole paragraphs during a grammar lesson. This was tedious but occasionally the evocativeness of a line or phrase would take

me by surprise. For some reason, one line has stuck in my memory: 'The way was long, the wind was cold, the minstrel was infirm and old.'

The girls called the toilet 'fairy land'. This was a seedy grey cement building that stood apart from the main structure that housed the classrooms. While entering it, one had to guard against stepping on foul, wet and squishy substances. In fact, one tried not to enter it at all. After so many years I think I remember this abode of the fairies because of a friend who was expelled from school for writing 'dirty' messages on the walls of this pleasant building.

**L**unch break was something to be looked forward to. My sister, my brothers and I met near the broad, curving stone stairway of the St. Joseph's Cathedral and waited impatiently for the bearer to arrive with our food. In those days 'bearer' was the name generally employed for the manservant around the house, whose work was a bit like a butler's. For us he was literally the bearer of the food that my mother packed, piping hot, into tiffin carriers. There he would come, sailing along on his bicycle, his pajamas tightened at the bottom with wire hoops ballooning out in the breeze, his bald pate with its tufts of hair at the sides giving him a peculiar dignity. We called him William Shakespeare because of his astonishing resemblance to the great dramatist.

Our days seemed to be full of a succession of tutors. Now when I think about it there were only three, at various points of time, though they followed close upon each other's heels. Kedarnath was our Kathak dance teacher. He wore a stainless steel bangle on one wrist and was a short man who chewed betel endlessly. No sooner had my sister and I got back from school and settled down, after a

brief scuffle for the most comfortable chair, with tea and our respective story books than the familiar cough would be heard outside and we had to reluctantly make our way to the 'dance room'. Our dance teacher could make the most astonishing sounds with his feet when he showed us the steps but we could never manage to move our feet with the same force or precision.

**S**ometimes he rolled little cups from silver paper out of cigarette packets and stuck them on the ceiling of the 'dance room'. The process of rolling the cups and then sticking them onto the ceiling was an intricate one and required a measure of skill. It required just the right amount of lime from his betel box and a capacity to throw accurately. Given Master Sahib's height, this was no easy task and took up most of the dance time. Now this seems a somewhat unusual means of amusement but then it seemed natural enough. Indeed we looked forward to the days when Master Sahib would be in one of his frivolous moods. There were other times when dance class was painfully boring and I even remember days on which we actually hid in the bushes to escape the tedium of those classes. After some time dance classes were replaced by lessons in classical music, till the pressure of school examinations put an end to that as well.

Maulvi Sahib had been given living quarters in the outhouse in our compound, which meant that he could arrive for a lesson at any time and it was always time for a lesson. He was called Talib Jaipuri and he taught us Urdu. He was a shrunken, slightly bent old man who always wore a *shervani* to work and seemed an innocuous sort of person till we discovered that he was capable of delivering peremptory raps on the knuckles with his pencil if he found work wanting in any res-

pect. He died when he accidentally knocked over a kerosene lamp in his room and a fire broke out. His *shervani* that had miraculously escaped the fire hung on an iron hook in the charred room when we visited it a month later on returning from Ranikhet where we had gone for the summer vacation.

Not much that was unusual occurred in the leisured passage of our days. Once in a while though something did happen that gripped the general imagination for some time. One such instance was the 'miracle chapati'. This was a chapati shaped fungus that multiplied overnight when soaked in tea and was supposed to impart miraculously healing properties to the tea. Nobody found out whose research contributed to this discovery but suddenly the air was thick with stories of cancer and other terminal diseases having been cured by the drinking of the chapati-soaked tea.

**N**ewspapers carried pictures of the thing on the front page and soon the chapati had found its way into almost every house. Our chapati too, arrived from the neighbour's and my mother who was stricken with diabetes dreamed of days free of insulin injections. I had nothing to cure but myopia and I watched the hideous mushroom multiply with fascinated disgust. To this day I shudder when I remember the cold, flaccid feel of the fungus on my finger. It brought about no miracles, however, and the chapati disappeared with the same suddenness with which it had arrived. A couple of years later, no one remembered it, people's minds having moved on to other more interesting things.

We slept outdoors on summer nights. Our beds were laid out in a row under the mahua tree, complete with mosquito nets and looking like a fleet of odd square ships on the high seas. The sheets were white and moonlight

cool. Very early in the morning, when it was still dark, the ripe mahua fruit lightly plummeted from the high branches of the majestic tree. The servants took turns at gathering the fruit from which they brewed country liquor. We sometimes found ourselves trapped with mosquitoes inside the mosquito nets that were ostensibly there to keep them out. Then we found the light-winged creatures dull with a surfeit of blood, on the sides of the net in the morning.

**T**wo or three times in the year my maternal grandmother visited us from Benares. She was a Shia Muslim who was strict about observing all ritual that her religion demanded. It is strange to think about her now, in an age when stereotyping is the order of the day and everything, including people are stashed away neatly into boxes of a convenient size. I could not have found a box whose shape she could possibly fit, if I had tried. We were in love with Ammi. We waited for her visits and the day she was to arrive, there was a flutter of excitement in the house. I remember her arrival one blistering summer afternoon. She barely had time to take off the *burqa* that she customarily wore when one of us, eager to find out how long she would stay, indeed to make her stay for as long as possible, blurted out, 'Ammi, when will you go?' 'Right now, if you like, child!' was her characteristic reply.

There were reasons for her popularity. She had a prepossessing personality, full of enormous charm and wit, capable of captivating strangers with her gift for humorous repartee. Looking at her, one became convinced that Indian women, at least not all of them, were not the frail, dominated creatures that people imagined them to be. Physically strong, she was able to single-handedly lift off the

fire cauldrons heavy with food for the hundred odd people who habitually came to the house during Moharram. When she became too old to handle the kitchen any longer, two men had to be hired to do this job.

Gifted with the same genius for weaving patterns in her embroidery as for creating characters and settings in the stories she told us late into the night, she held us in a spell, her deeply textured voice always beckoning to us from the depths of some magical labyrinth. It is her deep voice that I remember filling the grey sky of dawn, with the verses in Arabic that she recited from the Qoran. She learnt how to read Devnagiri at the age of seventy-five in order to be able to read the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. We never failed to be surprised at the contrasts in her personality; at the beautiful unpoluted Urdu that formed her usual speech which could, on provocation, slide into an inventive swearing that embarrassed even the servants. At the fact that she wore a burqa to go out and smoked *biris* which she graciously allowed us to light for her. She didn't mind if we took a puff or two.

**W**e travelled to Benares a couple of times in the year. Usually we took a train on the small gauge that chugged along, smugly contemptuous of the short distance it was expected to cover in three hours, blowing smoke and soot in our faces. It stopped at every little somnolent station on the way, and if it capriciously skipped a station or two, there were always people on the train who pulled the chain to make it stop. Depending on the time, there were milkmen who got on with clanking milk-cans or students who carried their bicycles into the train to effect more speedy arrival and departure. Nearly every station had a peepul or a banyan tree, often with a sadhu sitting beneath it. The names of the stations,

carried a peculiar resonance and I rolled them on my tongue like a connoisseur tasting wine: Handia, Jangiganj, Kachhwa Road, Madhosingh, Raja Talab, Manduadih. They had about them something reminiscent of wet earth and samosas.

**O**ur house in Benares was two hundred years old and had seen successive generations of nawabs come into their own under its roof. Their eccentricities made up the fabric of some of the stories that Ammi told us and there were bizarre details concerning some ancestors whom we would have been loath to meet now. However, there were no nawabs left. Thousands of sparrows that had made their home in the ancient madhumalti vine that ran all along the walls of the inner courtyard started a raucous chirruping at daybreak; a symphony loud enough to infiltrate the deepest slumber. My aunt shook the vine and they flew into the sky with a tremendous whirring of wings that seemed to set the space around the madhumalti in motion.

There were old daguerreotype pictures on the walls. The great grandfather who had married the British priest's daughter; their son Horace who must be eighty five and alive somewhere in Kent; the daughter dressed in Indian clothes, dead at thirteen; cruel Kamran Chacha, the scourge of the family. The past overwhelmed the present with its portrait gallery of the dead, more numerous than those alive. The objects in the house had their own tales to tell. I studied the pestle in which my great grandmother had supposedly pounded to bits an enormous diamond fallen out of her ring, mistaking it for a betel nut. Some Wedgwood china plates were still around. They had false bottoms that held hot water to keep food warm and had survived the bouts of gener-

osity to which an extravagant nawab ancestor had been prone, in which he had given away whatever someone happened to fancy.

And somewhere beyond this Benares that we knew, breathed another Benares with markets and alleyways and *ghats* near the river dotted with straw umbrellas. There were ancient rams with curving horns, widows with shaven heads, foreign hippies, sadhus and *pahalwans* slick with oil who dived into the river at dawn. Once in a while we did stray into this other Benares too. As a matter of fact, Dadi Amma, my father's mother lived in Godowlia, in the heart of this other Benares. She lived on the second floor of an enormous red building with ornate wrought iron balustrades, a large central courtyard and green shutters in all the windows and doors. The house had scores of rooms, most of which were locked up because she could only live on one floor at a time. From the balconies it was possible to view the streets crawling with life below, with the perspective provided by distance and no fear of being stampeded.

**D**adi Amma was a small woman with a frail constitution. She had been a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and had spent some time in jail in the fiery years before Independence. She always dressed in a white *khadi* sari. Her eyes had turned an oceanic grey behind her round horn-rimmed glasses due to cataract. She was a woman of set habits, with a fetish for washing her hands. She always sent for chum-chums whenever we visited. They were syrupy sweets of a light orange colour, with grains of sugar stuck on them. Dadi Amma was supposed to have dominated my grandfather. Looking at her then, it was hard to believe.

We travelled to Ranikhet or Mussoorie every summer till I was nine or ten. Crossing over from the plains to

the hills was not a simple affair. It meant the relocation of the entire household, more or less. My father drove us there in the Studebaker, and before the Studebaker had been bought, in the Pick-up that my brothers once tried to roll down a hill in Ranikhet just for a dare. Pots and pans and kettles travelled in the unlikely company of satin quilts and patchwork bedspreads; books, toys, rolls of canvas and boxes of Winsor and Newton paints sat uneasily on canisters full of rice and dal. The parrot went in its cage and Caesar, the unpredictable Alsatian on a leash. It was a migration of no small dimensions.

**H**ouses in the hills had quaint English names: Macquarrie, Clyde Bank, Rose Mount, Oakley. We lived the longest in Oakley. The house was a wooden structure, built in three storeys, with extensive grounds thickly wooded with oak and pine. There was a cottage at the far end of the grounds in which the painter Ram Kumar lived with his wife and a three month old son. Mr. Holpin lived just below us, in the ground floor of the house. He was an old Englishman who wore a bowler hat and manufactured cheese at home. Crescents and spheres, rectangles and squares of cheese, cheese coated with red wax, yellow cheese with holes; there was a bewildering variety of cheese in the little cupboard in the kitchen.

Mr. Holpin selected a sphere of the largest size and looked at me with a twinkle in his eye – 'Sara?' He paused at the word, as though deliberating over a serious question. Then, apparently finding an answer, exclaimed, 'Ah! Saraduniya! The whole world!'

He handed the cheese with a sense of giving me the whole world. I graciously accepted it, exuberant about owning the world, though I did not know what to do with it.

# Remembering Partition

IN this year of our golden jubilee of Independence, the joyous memory of freedom is simultaneously tinged with one of regret. The anniversary is also one of the Partition massacres. Engagement with the latter seems, in a peculiar manner, to have overshadowed the memory of the freedom struggle. And notwithstanding bitter debates over the telecasting of Govind Nihlani's *Tamas*, we have seen this year the release of Pamela Rooks' *Train to Pakistan* based on Khushwant Singh's novel.

More intriguing than the fictional and cinematic recalling of those traumatic times is the new excitement in the portals of the academe to study the pain, the limits of violence epitomised by the Partition. And this time around, more than basing the studies on archival material, including the now de-classified documents on the transfer of power, the focus is on interviewing the victims. This exercise of re-writing history through excavating the memory of the erstwhile victims, through making them relive their pain, trauma, and anger raises contentious questions. Maybe, next time around, the researchers could focus on the more recent horrors of the Punjab, a Jammu and Kashmir, or the North East.

We present below extracts from a dialogue between **Javed Alam**, political scientist and activist, and **Suresh Sharma**, historian. They are troubled by the new-found interest in the Partition. They raise issues directed, not just towards those engaged in this new oral history venture, but at all of us as citizens. Memory, as they remind us, is not just about remembering, it is also about forgetting.

**JA:** We notice that in the last few years there has been a sudden interest in recollecting/reviving the memories of Partition. What we had earlier was fiction of many kinds – novels, short stories, poems. But this present revival is taking the form of history, of social science, as something important for a long-term remembrance of what happened to our people at a particular point in history. It is appropriate to start by asking why this sudden interest, why this sudden shift from a more conventional history to history written through recollection of memories of people?

**SS:** What you say about the memory of Partition as a self-consciously historical, social science inquiry, is significant. It isn't as if Partition was not remembered in the 1950s and '60s. It was, as you said, in fiction, in memoirs. I can think of at least one important novel – Yashpal's *Jhootha Sach*. At another level in personal conversations it figured more frequently than it does now.

The significance of the last few years lies in the way literary writings, personal memoirs and reports have been converted, in a very self-conscious way, into a project of self-understanding. I am not sure whether this shows a new confidence of being able to look at aspects which are extremely painful and traumatic. I would like to believe we now have the ability to handle this, to come to a proper, fuller, more truthful sense of what we are, what we could be, as much as what we ought not to be.

**JA:** I think this new interest in looking at Partition through memory has also to do with the general dissatisfaction with the way conventional history about Partition has been written. The scholars who are now

working on it have raised two points: one, that in our historical accounts there is a complete absence of the voice of the marginalised. It is important today to recapture that voice. Some have argued that this can only be recovered and recorded for posterity by going back to those very people who were the victims. The other question that many people have asked is: why is it that history has recorded the event but not the pain of that particular event.

It is not quite correct to say that the pain has not been recorded. It has – in fiction, novels, short stories, memoirs, plays and all that. It seems to me that these mediums can record pain much better than can a historical narrative. Then, there is the charge that most accounts of the Partition are excessively nationalistic in a narrow sense. To get away from this nationalist thrust, it is important to go back to the people who suffered, because it is they who were forced to become a part of this particular kind of making of a nation. In this making of a nation we have tried to wipe out these very people who were involved in or opposed to a notion of the nation that was imposed.

**SS:** You are right – these are indeed the broad arguments. One, the absence of human experience and pain in the larger historical narrative. Two, the historical narratives are cast within certain cardinal demarcations in terms of some notion of a national boundary, both in inner life as well as outer space. Together they create a play between the memory of an individual and the making of a collective identity. It has to do with what is understood as the politics of identity, the history of identity formation and the things one should be looking at in order to get to the truth. Besides, these questions and arguments are being formulated at a time when there has been a loss of certainty about the historical project itself; about historical method giving us clear insights into that historical project.

Let me mention another aspect which takes us to a much older debate as to the very nature of a historical event. It concerns the question raised with such prescience by Tolstoy in *War and Peace*. What is war constituted of? Is it the soldier lying writhing in blood, or the dispatches in the office of the General? Can it ever be grasped in its totality, and if so, can it be grasped through these discrete happenings? Is it that without these discrete happenings there is really nothing called war? This paradox has profound implications for the system of inquiry and knowledge called history.

**JA:** The point you raise is interesting, but I haven't heard any of those who are writing such history or social science ever mention it. They seem less concerned with

the relation between the discrete and the general, the overall form in which you look at the discrete, as Tolstoy does for example. It appears more a case of disenchantment, a sense of unease; a rejection of history written with a capital H, as a singularity which is based entirely on post-enlightenment rationality. Some have gone to the extent of stating that history doesn't make sense whereas memory is concrete. In other words, what is important is to recollect the past in our own ways rather than through this particular history written with a capital H.

**SS:** What do you think is the one main reason for trying to recover this memory as a knowledge statement? Once you take it beyond the point of people recounting their personal experiences, whether in memoirs, ordinary conversation, or through fiction, and get to it through the methods of social science, history, however diverse or fragmented it may have become, represents a new quest. What is the significance that you read into this quest?

**JA:** Many of them have yet to publish their final work. But I remain skeptical that it would lead to a knowledge system in the way that earlier history writing did.

Let's get back to some of the more concrete issues involved at this stage. Looking at Partition, there is something which strikes us as a particularity. There are innumerable cases of large-scale massacres mutually indulged in by people at a moment of loss of judgment, of a sense of proportion, at a moment of frenzy. There is no involvement of large organisations or the state as the instrument of mass killings. You can't therefore talk of these events as a general phenomena. Further, it is difficult to distinguish between the victim and the perpetrator. They are often one and the same. At one place people were killing other people in the name of religion, or community; at another place these very people were the victims. They were rolled into one in this large event, the memory of which people want to recover. Do you see any particularity in that?

**SS:** I do, and I share what you said. I think there is a distinctiveness to the Partition memory which takes us to larger questions. First, it is difficult to draw a neat line separating victims from the victimised, however you define a particular identity, a particular collective. This also means that the valorization of the victim in many of these inquiries, and in the minds of many people, is seriously flawed.

The question to ask would be as to why the dividing lines in India are so suffused and inherently blurred. In catastrophes in other parts of the world when people have torn each other apart, the demarcation

seems simpler. When, for example, Spain was reconquered by the Christians and the line was drawn after centuries of Moorish rule, it was wiped clean of the Muslim presence. Similarly in North Africa. The line drawn was neat and absolute; the Christian presence was wiped clean.

Partition as an accomplished fact is something of a blurred achievement. I say this not with unhappiness or with satisfaction but with a sense of humility. What happened in the Indian subcontinent was horrible and traumatic. Large expulsions took place. There was large scale cleansing. But the lines still stay blurred, both in terms of our mental life as well as in living demography. This is true not only of India but in what is now Pakistan as well. The presence there of the non-Muslim is of a much smaller magnitude, but it has not disappeared. That it happened in this way tells you something about the distinctive ground from whence the memory of Partition itself unfolds.

**JA:** This blurred boundary is an interesting concept. Not just today, when we look at the event 50 years after it happened, but even at the very moment when mutual killings were taking place the boundaries were blurred. This comes through in all accounts, whether in fiction or memoirs. For every instance of killing that we hear of, we also hear of somebody's attempt to help, to rescue, somebody giving a shoulder to lean on. If they could not save your property, they tried to save your life. They helped you escape, they helped you hide till you could get to a safer place. It wasn't like the army of Christians driving out the Moors or the Muslims doing the same to the Christians. It was both things happening simultaneously – acts of kindness and acts of massacre. A clear manifestation of deep humanity as well as the perpetration of the most heinous kinds of crime – loot, murder, butchery, rape.

I remember an interesting sentence of Krishna Sobti's in a recent interview where she says that the Partition is difficult to forget but dangerous to remember. It leads to a question about the ethics of remembrance. Is it morally justifiable today – 50 years after the event – to go back and talk to the people who were the victims, to ask them to vividly recollect what happened to them, to their families? One justification is that we are not simply studying the violence; we also want to record the pain. Others argue that they want to map the limits of violence. But we can't see the limits of violence unless we also ask people to recall what they went through, to recount the trauma. I have a lingering suspicion that this is something which ought not to be done, that it is morally not sustainable.

**SS:** Before I respond to your last comment I would like to take up your earlier statement about blurred boundaries even in the midst of the most heinous acts. That in fact constitutes the ground from which the blurred boundaries I talked of earlier in living demography and mental life arise and become possible. For things of this kind – effectiveness of the personal gesture, individual sensitivity – to sustain in an environment requires sustenance from without. They have to seek possibilities which are not in the direct control of the individual. If that is not available then even the most heroic gesture would not acquire its historical staying power. Even a minimalist gesture acquires effectiveness only when this blurring happens on a scale wider and deeper than the person who is giving expression to it. This is the distinctive historical civilizational ground from which the blurred demography, the blurring of the Partition line itself in India has happened.

To give another example, nearly 60 years after the expulsion of the Moors there were still a large number of them in Spain who had formally converted to Christianity. But many in the Christian church and others believed that they secretly remained Muslims. Although they went to church, acquired Christian names, had been baptised, they practised many customs which were seen as Moorish. These people had a special name given to them – Moriscos. But this blurring of boundaries was something which a reconquered Spain was not comfortable with. So there was another mass expulsion of the Moriscos.

In a situation like the Partition, we have to be sensitive to the distinctive nature of our civilizational ground and what a project of recovering memory may do to it. Memory itself subsumes both remembrance and forgetting. It is inconceivable as an act of total remembrance. The quest for total remembrance, or for that matter total history, is gravely misplaced and dangerous. In the words of Nietzsche, it does not, indeed it cannot make a distinction between a state of wakefulness and sleeplessness. As we all know, the condition of sleeplessness is a pathology.

The modern project of memory has inbuilt into it a strange paradox. It is memory which makes the human species peculiarly prone to erratic irrational behaviour. And yet it is in the recasting of that memory that we see as the way out for the human species to behave in a rational, sane way.

**JA:** Let me focus on the relationship between forgetfulness and remembering. The human mind cannot remember or force itself to remember everything that happens. That would be asking it to go insane. Com-



ing back to Partition, I have two major considerations and that is why I approvingly stated that it is dangerous to recall the memory of Partition. At an individual level: how does one live a life of sanity after trauma. A part of the therapy of making a person live sanely, a normal life after trauma, is to help him forget the impact of the trauma so that it doesn't remain central to his consciousness. It slowly fades off. Or else we will suffer neurosis.

It is not appropriate to draw a comparison with psychotherapy. In it the victim voluntarily presents himself to the analyst. And he, through a long dialogue, draws out the repressed side of the experience of the patient and through a complex process of 'transference' effects a cure in the victim. The situation is quite different here. The interviewer chases the victim and draws him by pushing him back into a forgotten memory.

At another level there is a political consideration. If large numbers of people in the name of communities have at some point in time done something to each other, killed, indulged in massacre, brutality, as happened at Partition, if these communities, Muslims and Hindus and the Sikhs, have to live together in peace and harmony and amity, it is important that they leave behind these events as something most traumatic, something tragic but something most unfortunate which ought not to have happened. That they also think that we were all equally responsible.

At both these levels, the psychological as well as the political, it is important that such a memory is left behind rather than continuously revived. Instead you ask the person to recount it, to tell you what happened. Even when you ask him whether anybody helped, he can't do so without simultaneously going into the whole problem of what happened to him, because the help came under that particular context of terror and trauma. Years back when I first came to Delhi, everybody in the city had a siege mentality. They talked about what happened during Partition, what they had lost, the terrible conditions they had come out from. A good thing that has happened and why I think Delhi has acquired a different kind of an identity is that this siege mentality is dying out. Fewer people talk about Partition, or live it as an experience.

A new generation has emerged for whom the Partition is a distant historical event. It has gone back into their memory, which is important for our politics, for our social lives, for normal interaction between communities. The everydayness of life becomes normal when you forget this experience. When we go to people

and ask them to remember all that had happened, to recount it for the record, for many others to read what one did to the other, it seems to me morally indefensible. This is not to say that nothing of violence and victimisation should ever be remembered. I am talking about this specific memory.

Why should this memory of violence and victimisation be forgotten? I find that there are three different ways in which people become victims of violence. First, when there is a state or a state-like body which makes people victims of violence by directly carrying out genocide or massacres. We see it all over the world. It happened in Germany, in Serbia recently, in Russia. As a variant of it one may cite the case of the 1984 riots: the state became a part of the violence against the Sikhs, a massacre that the state sat and watched. Second, there is the instance, for example, of the events leading to and following the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The state wasn't there as perpetrator but it could have controlled it and it did not. I think this violence was entirely due to the involvement of a very large organisation, the Viswa Hindu Parishad of the Sangh Parivar. Hundreds of people were killed.

There is also a third type where people become victims of violence where at a moment of a loss of sanity they start killing each other. It is this third type of violence which we saw at Partition. This should be left behind, should be forgotten, so that people may live in peace, socially normal everyday life, politically as well as individually in terms of the traumas they have gone through.

**SS:** What do you think of the proposition you had mentioned earlier about exploring the limits of violence?

**JA:** On that I would like to raise a larger issue. A number of people feel that in Europe the memory of the Holocaust, the large scale genocide of the Jews by the Nazi state, has been institutionalised and with good effect. This is a spurious argument, untenable because I don't see a comparison, except for a surface resemblance between Partition and the Holocaust in Europe.

**SS:** This desire to explore the limits of violence doesn't make much sense because there is no absolute limit to violence except in the total cessation of life. I share the sense that this loss of sanity which happened on a large scale should not be forgotten. But its memory has to be recovered with a sense of deep responsibility and compassion because the very people who indulged in this killing have subsequently worked out equations of co-living, certain norms of more or less sane interac-

tion. Anything that interferes with that simply because it may yield a good and seemingly complete historical record is, I think, worthless. First, no historical record can ever be complete. The level of detail that one can pursue is without final limits. It could just be one story after another. I am not suggesting that what is being done is merely collecting stories. To me it seems a quest for a knowledge statement through these experiences, and it is that which I would like to discuss in the context of the Holocaust.

**JA:** Do you see any similarity between Partition violence and the Holocaust?

**SS:** I see only a surface similarity, large-scale destruction and killing but nothing beyond that.

**JA:** But what about the exodus?

**SS:** Yes, there is a surface similarity between the exodus and the Partition. But I think that the nature of the exodus memory and the nature of the Partition memory rest on two different historical grounds. These differences have to do with the very constitution of that ground in which the demarcations and lines are blurred in one case and sharp in the other. It is a suffused and intense kind of blurring which constitutes the historical ground called India.

**JA:** During the Holocaust we knew the victim and the perpetrator. There was an organised state which represented the worst that human reason could think of – fascist is the right word for it. It built up a campaign over a long period, it mobilised every resource of the state, of science and technology, to herd people together, to take them to concentration camps, to gas them, kill them and perform the most horrible experiments on human bodies to understand the limits of pain. Even when we look at the exodus historically, it always took place in the face of terror. Today what makes the exodus so difficult to digest is because the national boundaries have become congealed. The national boundary also seeks to impose an identity which you can't escape. If you don't share that identity it drives you out. This process of driving out becomes an exodus in the present case unlike in earlier times. Then, empires and states had flexible frontiers where people could move and shuffle and still live properly.

What remains crucial is the presence of a state which is the perpetrator. It is the state straightforwardly killing people and therefore to draw an example from the Holocaust and argue that since its memory has been institutionalised, there is nothing wrong in what we do is spurious. It is right, even morally necessary, to institutionalise the memory of the Holocaust. We have to remind people repeatedly of the dangers that a

fascist, authoritarian, dictatorial state poses for the people. We have to remind people of the threat that large fascist organisations pose. This is important for healthy politics, for democratic life, for a sane society. Which is why we remind them. I consider the Holocaust within that category, unlike what happened in Partition.

**SS:** No, that is not my argument. The Holocaust and the Partition are distinct, but the absence of the state may not always be the most important factor. True, its presence gives to the artifacts of modern technology a reach and effectiveness otherwise impossible. But let us pursue this parallel with the Holocaust. When I say that memory subsumes forgetting and remembrance, it means that everything need not be remembered, that everything is not remembered and, that everything is not remembered all the time.

Even this project of trying to recover the memory of Partition in its fullness or rawness is something which had to wait 50 years. It was not something which people thought of doing 30 years ago or soon after the Partition. My problem with this project is that it does not recognize the principle that not everything need be remembered all the time. Second, I am not arguing that since something terrible has happened it should be forgotten. The memory of something evil provides an assurance that we will not allow it to repeat itself in any form. The project of total recovery I fear would contribute, not to an assurance, but to eroding equations of sanity.

The memory of the Holocaust is easier to institutionalise because the victim and the victimiser could be clearly separated. The victimiser was also someone who could be put into an abstract docket, namely the state, or the organisation. Some individuals may have been identified but they did not have natural lives beyond themselves. It was this assigning of an abstract institutional responsibility which permitted society to see this process as relatively externalised, as something it could deal with once it had exorcised it. But when one considers a memory like that of the Partition, precisely because the victim and the victimiser may be of the same identity, the same collective, such externalisation is not available.

**JA:** I also feel that just as the memory of Holocaust can help us fight, make us conscious and sensitive towards fascism and what it can mean to the people, it is important to build up a struggle wherever we see traces of it beginning. It is important to expose the state as in the case of the Sikh killings. It is important to remember the Babri Masjid and even the preceeding

and following killings. By so remembering we can build up our anti-communal politics which is the basis of good democracy and sane life. The memory of Partition, I fear, could feed into a re-enforcement of a communal consciousness and give strength to communal politics.

Should we now talk of a related question, how do we look at this project of replacing history with memory, the recovery of past through memory. How feasible is it as a general project, not just in relation to Partition? How much can one, through this kind of a recalling of events from memory, really build up and understand the collective past?

**SS:** That is really the problematic part: the relationship between memory and history as a form of self-understanding and knowledge. I am struck by two words which are widely used. One is *construction* and the other is *invention*. Reinventing the community, inventing the nation, constructing memory, constructing communalism, constructing nationalism – everything is an act of construction or invention. Invention is; as you can see, a looser word and seems to posit a certain free-floating freedom to the agent which makes no philosophical sense whatsoever. Construction is slightly modulated, but only slightly so. It too seems to posit a freedom to the agent to choose, as it were, whatever one likes. The idea of construction provides little room for the never fully concluded play between agency and the ground from whence it proceeds. This leaves unanswered the question that in choosing what one is constructing from whence comes the coherence which guides you, which leads you to picking up one thing and not another.

This really troubles me. On the one hand what is being said is that there are no pure entities. On the other, the key activating instrument and agency through which these entities take shape is demarcated as construction, or worse, as invention. The two propositions don't seem to hold together at all.

**JA:** Let me remind you here that the word construction has an old lineage, it comes from Aristotle. Aristotle talked of construction, but as a literary form. You can construct a literary form, but you can't construct a community. A community to him was ontologically given. Today, there is a complete shift of terrain. Further, a historical community is always integrated in the flow of time and it is, in this flow of time, this embeddedness, being continuously reconfigured. Within this reconfiguration are elements which actors may pick up and bring to prominence, give a certain desired shape, but this is not the same

as construction. If you detach this process from this notion of embeddedness and reconfiguration, I think it poses a problem.

Second, I have difficulty with this mode of doing history. There are large historical forces behind the little events that happen. The breach between Hindus and Muslims in the 19th century, it becoming politicised, leading through a very torturous course to Partition. I think, for example, of the role of the British state and its policy of systematic divide-and-rule, of playing one community against the other. How does one capture that? The use of memory as a way of building the collective past seems inadequate to capture these larger forces as important factors in the lives of these societies.

Let me end here with a distinction which I consider important. This mode of doing history mainly via memory is therefore not what we called oral history. Oral history has been a part of the larger historical project. It helped fill up the paucity of data or to enrich it, but it never positioned itself as an alternative to conventional history.

**SS:** The moment we use a word like construction or invention, then to talk of reconfiguration or embeddedness makes little sense. A literary artifact can be identified with a particular individual. But even a literary artifact finds placement in a certain stream of literary memory by taking in a flow of literary energy which lies beyond itself. It has to be able to mesh with, connect with, to respond to things which lie completely beyond that individual artifact.

To transpose it to the making of collective demarcations, whether we call them memory or identity or nationality or whatever, seems to assign to some agency a kind of decisive freedom to pick up elements which are lying around. It is akin to the act of walking into a workshop and picking up the materials we want or take fancy to and make something out of them. Such a freedom which the act of construction seems to imply cannot, in any deep sense, account for embeddedness, continual reconfiguration.

This lies beyond the immediate control of agency, howsoever that agency is identified, whether as an individual or as an organisation. Strangely this happens in a discourse which never ceases to remind us that everything is mediated. And yet it also proceeds to represent almost everything as an act of construction. These two do not hold together. We have two cardinal explanatory devices which negate each other. Surely that should be a cause for concern and reflection.

# The politics of apology

SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN

THE end of the Cold War has ushered in a busy period for the assassins of memory,<sup>1</sup> for only when history officially 'ends' can it safely be anaesthetised, captured and destroyed. Remembrance has always been the most strategic of all battlefields – Habermas calls it 'the past as future' – and today, the fact that it is the site of such extraordinary violence should not surprise us much. Imperialism is determined to enter the 21st century with the curtain neatly drawn on its past crimes. Mediated by an amnesia that is carefully orchestrated, an inversion of reality is taking place: victimhood has become oppression, and subjugation, liberty. The defence of rights and sovereignty has become terrorism, and aggression democracy.

While this process is under way more or less on a global scale, the technology of forgetting varies from place

1. The phrase is borrowed from Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), a classic polemical work directed at revisionist attempts at Holocaust denial.

to place. In South Africa, it goes by the name of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body where the act of remembrance itself becomes an accomplice in the process of forgetting. But the broad contours of this strategy have already been tried and tested in both the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States of America, where the burden of the past has been cast aside rather effectively.

In a plaintive essay entitled 'A Past Which Refuses to Pass', the German historian Ernst Nolte protested that despite the passage of time – he was writing in 1986, forty one years after the defeat of Hitler – the Nazi era was not being allowed passage into that inert, emotionless, 'objective' territory called 'mere history'. Christian Meier, then the president of the German Historical Association, also complained that 'it is precisely this threshold to "mere history" that the 12 years from 1933 to 1945 seem unable to cross. This past does not pale, but on the contrary, becomes increasingly important and global in nature; it over-

shadows our lives with undiminished intensity.<sup>2</sup> The interventions of Nolte, Meier and others were part of a larger debate among German historians prompted by the May 1985 visit of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and US President Ronald Reagan to a cemetery in Bitburg where Nazi soldiers were buried. Taking a cue from Kohl and Reagan's benediction, many of them argued that it was time for Germany to move on, to become a 'normal' country, no different from others with a horrific past.

**C**entral to this project of normalisation was the historicising of Nazism, which itself involved a two part process. To begin with, the victims and perpetrators of Nazi war crimes were forcibly united in a common victimhood. Saul Friedlander cites as an example the German historian Andreas Hillgruber, who 'suggests by his descriptions... a symmetric framework of responsibility. The responsibility of the Nazis in exterminating their victims is certainly not denied... but it is, in a way, balanced against the responsibility of the Red Army for the crimes committed on German soil.' Friedlander argues that this doubling of perpetrators necessarily leads to the doubling of victims 'and thus to the transformation of the erstwhile tacit or explicit supporters of the Nazi system into victims, not unlike, in their suffering, for instance, the Jews.'<sup>3</sup> And if that seems like excessive extrapolation, consider what Reagan declared shortly before laying a wreath on the graves of the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS men at Bitburg. 'Those young men,' he said, referring to the soldiers, 'are victims

of Nazism also... They were victims just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps.'<sup>4</sup>

The second part of the exculpatory project of historicisation involves an even more outlandish claim: that the Nazis' genocidal programme of world conquest was merely *reactive*. It was birthed by its victims, by *their* desire to annihilate Germany and all 'western' values. Nolte is the most prominent exponent of this view. 'Auschwitz is not primarily a result of traditional anti-Semitism. It was in its core not merely a "genocide" but was above all a reaction born out of the anxiety of the annihilating occurrences of the Russian Revolution.'<sup>5</sup> In Friedlander's view, Nolte has moved from the symmetry of executioners and victims to the fringes of a reversed representation of historical responsibility... The central actor within the global historical context is now the Bolshevik. The Bolshevik is the original perpetrator of global annihilation in modern history.'

**T**he Third Reich has had a chequered career in the official historiography of the Federal Republic and of the US and a full discussion of the rise and fall of different ways of looking at Hitlerism is beyond the scope of this essay. During the Cold War, however, the legacy of Nuremberg was a fetter from which even the most ardent advocate of anti-communist containment could not escape. Of course, the US and its allies had deep reservations about carrying the Nuremberg process too far. Great care was taken to separate the Hitlerites from the German

capitalists who had enthusiastically financed the Fuehrer. In Potsdam, the Allies had committed themselves to punishing Hitler's financiers but the denazification of economic activity was never carried out in the western zones of occupation. And once the rearmament of a West Germany firmly embedded in NATO began, the field was opened for the establishment of moral equivalence between fascism and socialism.

**T**he revisionist German historians were merely doing then, in the academic sphere, what western economic, political and military policies were doing in real life. In the words of Habermas—who bitterly fought Nolte and his revisionist colleagues—the Nazi period has been reformulated as 'an unfortunate sidetrack of a process of world civil war'—between democracy and socialism—a war whose predetermined battle lines could only be drawn after 1945, because Stalin and Roosevelt didn't identify each other as true adversaries in a timely way.'<sup>6</sup>

Between Bitburg and the fall of the Berlin Wall, a kind of closure was established which allowed not just the renaissance of German nationalism as a 'respectable' phenomenon but also the re-emergence, via a greatly strengthened European Union, of Germany's ambitions as a big power. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic and the reunification of Germany have led to renewed attempts to equate Nazism and Communism—and to extract from that equation a supposedly pure national soul, untainted by the crimes of the Third Reich. Even as Chancellor Kohl spearheads the creation of a new memorial to Germany's war dead in Berlin, statues of communist fighters against Hitler like Ernst Thaelmann (erected

2. Quoted in Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

3. *Ibid.*

4. Quoted in Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape From the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

5. Ernst Nolte, 'Between Myth and Revisionism? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s', in H.W. Koch (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

6. Jürgen Habermas, *The Past as Future* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

by the East German government) have been pulled down. In October 1997, the world witnessed yet another grotesque irony. Even as regulators cleared the mega-merger between Krupp and Thyssen, two of Germany's largest conglomerates and the most prominent of Hitler's financiers, the German Constitutional Court threw out a case by a group of Jewish slave workers demanding back pay and compensation for their forced labour for German monopolies during the war. The Krupp-Thyssen merger, like other activities in the German business world in preparation for European monetary union in 1999, is what will allow Germany to once again be Germany; to acquire *lebensraum*, this time not for German people (which was always a pretext anyway) but for German capital. Nazism, then, has already been historicised. Its crimes have passed into 'mere history'.

In the US, other methods of forgetting the past have operated: a combination of tactical apologies—especially in response to shifts in the balance of power nationally and internationally—alongside the enthusiastic remembrance of other nations' pasts. It is no coincidence that outside of the Yad Vashem memorial in Israel, the most moving testament to the Jewish Holocaust lies in Washington DC and not in Bonn or Berlin. Nor is it a coincidence that the museum was built *after* the Cold War—and after the US interest in historicising Nazism—had ended. At the same time, those searching for museums in the US that depict the horrors of slavery or the annihilation of the Native Americans would be hard pressed to find anything even vaguely of the same magnitude.

When the past weighs so heavily on the present it is best to be amnesiac. Thus in 1995, when the Smithsonian Institute attempted to mount an exhibi-

tion of the Enola Gay along with explanatory panels which questioned the military necessity of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the exhibition was withdrawn and the museum's director sacked.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, an attempt by UNESCO to have the shattered hulk of the building which was the sole survivor of Fat Boy in Hiroshima declared a world heritage site was bitterly opposed by the US. When the nuclear theology of the US rests so squarely on its self-professed claim to being a 'responsible' nation, any reopening of the Hiroshima question is clearly taboo.

It is also interesting to analyse how the politics of apology works in the US. Earlier this year, a tearful President Bill Clinton apologised for medical experiments in which Black Americans with syphilis were deliberately denied treatment in an attempt to see how the disease would debilitate the human body. The experiments in Tuskegee, Alabama, were part of a government programme which ran for several decades, and though knowledge about the tests first became public in the 1970s, it took more than 20 years for the government formally to apologise. The Tuskegee apology touched off demands for an official apology for slavery. At one stage, President Clinton hinted that he might consider such an apology but this evoked howls of protest from Congressmen and Senators. The argument in favour was that it might help to defuse racial tensions and assuage the feelings of those African-Americans who feel the US government discriminates against them (the second a highly questionable motive). The arguments against were various: that the US gov-

ernment today was not responsible for what happened more than a century ago; that by 'reopening old wounds', racial tensions might increase; and that an apology might lead to demands for monetary compensation.

At stake was more than just the cost of reminding the world about the undemocratic roots of the world's greatest democracy. Slavery amounted to unpaid labour. Even though US courts have repeatedly thrown out attempts by descendants of slaves to claim back wages rightfully due to them, an official apology would be seen as a mockery if it came without an adequate package of compensation. Jack E. White—a Time magazine columnist whose grandfather was a slave—has estimated a figure of \$222 billion on the basis of 244 years of forced labour by 10 million slaves at 25 cents per day, the going rate for unskilled work in those days. Once another \$222 billion is added for pain and suffering and a compound interest rate of 3 per cent for the 134 years since emancipation is factored in, the outstanding amount becomes \$24 trillion. That is, as he says, 'serious money'.<sup>8</sup> While acknowledging that such a sum could never be paid, White said the US government could spend the money over a number of years on programmes aimed at the socio-economic betterment of Blacks.

President Clinton, of course, said he was opposed to reparations for slavery<sup>9</sup> and the whole issue of an apology for the kidnapping and enslavement of Blacks was quietly shelved. More recently, a similar controversy arose about whether the British Queen should apologise for the massacre at Jallianwalla Bagh in 1919. In the lat-

7. See Edward Liventhal, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and other Battles* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997) for a full account of the controversy.

8. Jack E. White, 'Sorry Isn't Good Enough', *Time*, 30 June 1997.

9. Reparations for Allied losses in the Gulf War against Iraq are another matter entirely.

ter instance, too, no apology was forthcoming and it is worth asking why the two states most vocal about their official commitment to the protection of democracy and human rights around the world found it impossible to say sorry for injustices perpetrated by them so many years ago.

**T**he question of an apology for an act committed in the past arises only if there is continuity of state power. By this yardstick, the British and US governments are today fully responsible for all the actions of their respective states at least since 1688, 1215 or 1066, if not earlier (in the case of the former) and 1776 (in the case of the latter). Merely to claim that such-and-such event took place a long time ago, then, is no defence. On the other hand, when there is no continuity of state power – say, due to a revolution – the question of an apology does not arise.

There are, in general, three reasons why states or individuals refuse to apologise for their past. First, they may not believe they have done anything wrong. Rhodesia's Ian Smith and apartheid South Africa's P.W. Botha, for example, still believe that what they did was right. Pol Pot, leader of the murderous Khmer Rouge, has likewise defended the policies he followed when he was in power. That no former colonial power has ever apologised for colonialism is probably due to the same reason.

A second possible reason for not apologising could be that the state is still indulging in the same general practice for which it is being asked to apologise. Some people have linked the US government's refusal to apologise for slavery, for example, with the persistence of official racism against African-Americans today.

The most important reason for not wanting to own up to past wrong-

doing is, however, because states fear the enormous financial and political consequences. Can Britain really apologise for the crimes of colonialism without calling into question the moral validity of all its existing political and economic institutions? Prime Minister Tony Blair can issue a very limited apology for the fact that food was exported out of Ireland during the famine in that country during the 1850s but it will not be easy for him to apologise for turning Ireland into a colony, fostering communalism and eventually partitioning the country. If he did, the British position on Northern Ireland would be severely undermined.

**A**s far as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair are concerned, the criminality which pervades the history of their states is not systemic. Tuskegee and the Irish famine were mere accidents and did not stem from reasons intrinsic to the way the US and Britain are constituted and ruled. Likewise with slavery. The fact that the US Constitution once permitted the enslavement of human beings is irrelevant; it is not a burden on the conscience of the US any more. It must not be allowed to cast a shadow over the US's democratic credentials today.

If Clinton were ever to apologise for slavery, it would be for an abstract, extrinsic system of evil and not for a system whose remnants are imbricated in the very make up of the US today. Had the British Queen apologised for Jallianwalla Bagh, it would have been for General Dyer's criminality and not for the illegality on which the British Empire was built. States – and individuals connected with those states – apologise only when the alternative is more costly. Such apologies are not only insincere and worthless but dangerous precisely because they carry with them this

shield of irrelevance. They aim to put a closure on a sequence of events which hasn't ended, whose full accounting is yet to be done. Robert McNamara's *mea culpa* for the bombing of Indochina was published even as his successors in the US government were bombing Iraq and bullying other countries throughout the world. And even as the government of Vietnam was forced to repay \$70 million of debts accumulated by the former South Vietnamese puppet regime as the price for getting new investment from the US, the perpetrators of war crimes got away with a mere apology. The victims, on the other hand, must pay to dine at the same table with them.

Apologies between individuals occur in all societies but what does it mean when an apology is tendered on behalf of states, institutions and other corporate entities? Between individuals, an apology is not merely offered but must also be accepted. Forgiveness and the resumption of normal relations occur where there is genuine acknowledgement of hurt, genuine remorse and genuine attempts to right past wrongs. In the absence of this, apologies are meaningless both at the individual and state level and to make – or even demand – such an apology is tantamount to sweeping historical problems under the carpet. The demand from the anti-Narasimha Rao faction of the INC that the Congress apologise for failing to protect the Babri Masjid is only one example of this kind of apology.

**T**he most systematic and morally repugnant display of spurious apologies is going on today in South Africa. One by one, the assassins of the former apartheid regime have been coming forward – in the name of 'reconciliation' and 'healing' – to confess to their sins and reveal the manner in which members of the anti-apartheid resis-

tance were tortured and murdered. These confessions – made before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu – are then dutifully entered into the archive and filed away, while the criminals walk off with an unconditional amnesty so long as they are deemed to have spoken the whole truth and to have shown that their crimes were ‘proportional’ and committed solely for political reasons. There are no arrests, no prosecutions, no jail sentences, no executions. It is almost as if the mere act of confession is absolution enough for all of apartheid’s crimes.

**T**hat the apartheid regime indulged in gross violations of human rights and constituted, by its very existence, a crime against humanity is well-known. Throughout the years of the armed struggle waged by the ANC and others, it was understood that those responsible would ultimately be held accountable for their crimes. This has been a cardinal principle of any freedom struggle and has become a customary norm of international law ever since Nuremberg. The logic of punishment is based not so much on retribution, as on emphasising that there are certain limits of behaviour which cannot be transgressed by individuals or states under any circumstances.

The idea of an amnesty was an integral part of the peaceful, negotiated transition which marked the end of apartheid. Built into the country’s new constitutional framework, the purpose of the Truth Commission was to ‘establish as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the (apartheid) period including the antecedents, circumstances, factors and context of such violations.’ But was the truth about apartheid so unknown

and reconciliation with its perpetrators so important that it required hundreds of thousands of victims to give up their right to justice?

**I**t is paradoxical that in a world where octogenarian Nazis can still be pursued around the globe and forced – quite rightly – to bear responsibility for their role in one crime against humanity, South Africans who have taken part in another should be allowed to get away scot free. The only way out of this paradox is to accept what former South African President F.W. de Klerk said in his second, nakedly unrepentant submission to the TRC in April 1997, that apartheid was not a crime against humanity but a well-intentioned policy of ‘separate development’ with ‘a strong sense of idealism’. Though he agreed apartheid was a ‘mistaken’ policy, he said the anti-apartheid resistance was responsible for helping to ‘create circumstances and an atmosphere which were conducive to human rights abuses’. Like the German historians who claimed a symmetry between the Nazis and their victims, de Klerk said that ‘no single side has a monopoly of virtue or should bear responsibility for all the abuses that occurred.’<sup>10</sup>

De Klerk has every right to enter his point of view into the historical record and it is the duty of others to refute it. However, the TRC’s terms of reference are such that symmetry between the actions of the apartheid state and the resistance fighters was established as the very starting point. Apart from de Klerk, therefore, leaders of the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania and others have

been forced to appear before the TRC to render qualified apologies for their conduct during the liberation struggle – surely a spectacle as bizarre as Mordecai Anielewicz and his comrades (had they survived) being summoned before a West German commission to apologise for any civilians killed during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

**I**t is often argued that apartheid cannot be compared with the Holocaust because unlike Germans and Jews in post-Nazi Germany, South Africa’s blacks and whites continue to live in the same society. Thus, there is no room for Nuremberg-style justice. This is precisely the point made by Thabo Mbeki, vice-president of South Africa. In a recent interview with *The Guardian* of Lagos, he rejected the idea that reconciliation is not possible without an element of justice. ‘Well, we had to take a decision. We could take the route of justice, understood as police investigations, prosecutions and so on, so that you deliver justice so that people who were harmed (by apartheid) will feel that justice has been done.... (But) we decided to take the route of the Truth Commission because (otherwise) this conflict would have continued. You could not have had this peaceful transition in this country if some were to feel threatened.... In the end, what do you want to address? Do you want to get a sense of satisfaction after retribution? Or do you create conditions for the rebuilding of South Africa?’<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, most of apartheid’s victims reject this logic: The widow of Harold Sefola – whose killers confessed before the TRC in 1996 – has challenged the right of the ANC and National Party leaders to deny her justice. Her submission to the TRC

10. The partial text of de Klerk’s first submission before the TRC was printed in *The Times* (London), 22 August 1996. For a report of his second submission, see M.S. Prabhakara, ‘de Klerk differentiates apartheid from “crimes”’, *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 30 March 1997.

11. *The Guardian* (Lagos), 4 November 1996.



made a distinction between forgiveness and justice and said the latter was the responsibility of the state. 'These people never came to ask us for forgiveness. The government is doing this on our behalf.... It is people who should forgive each other, not the government.' The widow of Steve Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement who was killed by the apartheid regime in 1981, was even more forthright when the murderers of her husband applied for amnesty. She condemned the whole process as a travesty and demanded punishment as a right.

**W**hat Mbeki considers 'retribution' can be an obstacle to the 'rebuilding' of South Africa only if the intention is to 'rebuild' the country by keeping the economic edifice of apartheid intact. This is a truth which the TRC has not chosen to talk about. The criminals of apartheid cannot be punished because otherwise they would not have agreed to hand over power. Likewise, the assets and privileges of the big conglomerates, farmers and others who thrived on the basis of expropriated land and forced labour cannot be touched because they too would never have agreed to a transfer of power.

Because of the flawed manner in which apartheid ended – a transfer of power, preserving the continuity of the state, rather than overthrowing it, South Africans are being denied not only justice but the opportunity to reverse the legacy of the racist regime. Western-style fiscal conservatism is being pursued in the name of protecting the rand and not scaring off the same foreign investors whose presence in South Africa during the apartheid era was fiercely opposed by the ANC. Even something as fundamental as granting cast iron tenancy rights to peasants working on the estates of white farmers (culled from lands his-

torically expropriated from the blacks) has been stymied for fear of the economic repercussions.

The much-vaunted Rapid Development Plan for the provision of housing, sanitation, water, electricity and jobs for the millions of Black citizens has yet to get off the ground, mainly because the government has remained a hostage to the demands of South Africa's financial and corporate sector and of the international financial institutions which previously bankrolled apartheid. IMF support for apartheid included loans of more than one billion dollars in the aftermath of the financial crisis caused by the Soweto uprising in 1976 and the crash in gold prices in the early 1980s. The ANC at the time had bitterly criticised the IMF for bolstering the racist regime. Today, however, things have turned a full circle. In 1993, the IMF granted a huge loan to the new post-apartheid government which included secret conditionalities that the undemocratic economic policies of the apartheid days would not be reversed, as well as informal conditions that Mandela would leave the finance ministry and the SA Reserve Bank in the hands of de Klerk appointees.<sup>12</sup>

**T**he burden of truth without justice is too much for any society to bear, least of all one in which the elements of victimhood – political, economic and spiritual – continue to be present in such alarming abundance. Pamela Reynolds, an anthropologist at the University of Cape Town doing fieldwork among young militants who fought the regime, pointed out in a recent seminar at the Delhi School of Economics that many of them were refusing to tell their stories before the TRC. Apart from general cynicism

about the outcome, their objection was that apartheid oppressed a collective, it victimised and tortured an entire people, but the TRC was instituting an individualised approach.

**B**ut there is a further point. Not only does the TRC put victimhood at a purely individual plane (this is not necessarily so objectionable) but it treats victimisers as individuals as well: the torturers and hangmen of apartheid come and render an individual account; they are treated as individuals and not as footsoldiers of a system which was much larger than them. This is what allowed the last leader of that system, F.W. de Klerk, to baldly state before the TRC that 'within my knowledge and experience,' the strategies followed by the (apartheid) government 'never included the authorisation of assassination, murder, torture, rape, assault or the like.... Nor did I directly or indirectly ever suggest, order or authorise such action.'<sup>13</sup>

Professor Reynolds is apprehensive that those militants who deliberately stay away from the TRC will only ensure that what emerges is a 'skewed history' and since, according to Derrida, what is remembered (the archive) is a source of power, their silence will ultimately work against them. But surely the TRC itself is an act of violence against history and by refusing to go before it, the young militants are really saying that they refuse to be party to this violence. Thousands of apartheid victims have brought their fearsome stories to the TRC and each individual story has shocked the conscience of South Africa. But in the end, because there is no justice, each victim is becoming

12 Statement of the Campaign against Neoliberalism in South Africa, 16 October 1996.

13. *New Nation* (Johannesburg), 22 August 1996. The newspaper's editorial the next day, 'The Only Truth is the Whole Truth', noted that 'de Klerk stretches public credulity when

an accomplice in the exoneration of the crime committed against herself or himself. Remembrance has become instrumental in forgetting. The cataloguing system in what Derrida calls the 'archive' is all flawed and the only reconciliation it is designed to achieve is to reconcile the victims of apartheid to the fact that they will get no justice.

When the TRC issues its final report, the aim will be to put a closure not just on the past but on the remnants of apartheid which continue to permeate life in South Africa, especially in the economy. The only circumstance in which the shelving of prosecutions for individual cases might be ethically justifiable would be if South Africa had undergone a genuine revolution. The delivery of justice at the societal level would be the price for its non-delivery at the individual level. If South Africa had undergone a truly revolutionary transformation, in which the economic structures of apartheid were thoroughly dismantled, the TRC would have been a genuine instrument for establishing truth and reconciliation. In the absence of such change, all it is designed to do is to ease the passage of apartheid into 'mere history'. Whether it succeeds or not is still an open question. No closure of the past is possible by fiat. This is manifest in the revival of centuries-old claims for justice in Ireland and other countries. The more the lack of economic development and social justice become apparent, the more restive the people of South Africa will become. And no matter how hard anyone tries to eradicate their history, they are perfectly capable of creating it anew.

he denies personal knowledge of torture and rape during his reign. The same goes for his failure to offer any insight into the fate of scores of anti-apartheid activists who went missing while in police custody.... Unless the truth is told about all this, de Klerk's apology will amount to nought. Reconciliation then would be made impossible.

# Gandhi and history

SUNIL KHILNANI

I believe in the saying that a nation is happy that has no history. It is my pet theory that our Hindu ancestors solved the question for us by ignoring history as it is understood today and by building on slight events their philosophical structure. Such is the *Mahabharata*. And I look upon Gibbon and Motley as inferior editions of the *Mahabharata*.

M.K. Gandhi (1924)<sup>1</sup>

GANDHI was not a theorist but, like everyone else, he had theories. His fundamental innovation in the history of Indian nationalist politics was to force the abandonment of the notion of a heroic intellectual vanguard — variously composed (according to differing conceptions) of dissident theorists, would-be state technocrats, scholarly Brahminic reformists, or professional revolutionaries — that could transform India and lead her to genuine *swaraj*. The theoretical knowledges that such men claimed for themselves could not make the social and historical worlds transparent or manipulable. Rather, history and society were intelligible to the victims of history.

True heroism, Gandhi insisted, was to be found in the quiet tolerances unnoticed by history and its standard

1. In Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), vol 1, p.187.

representations but which in fact constituted the common life of men and women. It is the very ordinariness of Gandhi's theories and practices, their rootedness in the routine and mundane, which has endowed his life and thought with a deceptive familiarity – and this has made him at once prone to neglect and difficult to comprehend.

**H**ow did Gandhi position himself in the world? Not as an intellectual would do, by the adoption of the authoritative voice of theory, nor by the creation of a body of aesthetic work, nor merely through pure action, nor – as other nationalists have often done – by manipulation of the historical representations of the political community. Gandhi's own presence in history was, to use the English rendering of a Heideggerian phrase, intensely 'thingly' – his body and its routines, his gestures, voice, and dress, all embodied the at once profound fragility and awesome robustness which defined his life and thought.<sup>2</sup> Those who have complained of Gandhi that he did not leave behind a substantial enough body of 'political theory' in textual form betray a deep misunderstanding of him.

Gandhi chose to convey his meanings in other ways and he defies being understood in purely propositional terms. The clue to his meanings rests in what might be called the grammar that underlies his way of being: it was on the basis of this that he most manifestly defied the supposedly irreversible forward drift of history, a supposition axiomatic to all evolutionary and progressive conceptions of historical development. It enabled him to play adeptly with anachronism and to drag the historically *depassé* into the

gaze of public notice, so allowing him to reconfigure tradition. His capacity to do this disrupted all the conventions used to define the contemporary or the present, the modern, from the historical past and future. Gandhi was a man obsessed by time and punctuality (a pocket watch was one of his few constant material possessions), yet he refused the idea of unilinear historical time.

Gandhi aimed to give political significance to the everyday pictures of the world used by his fellow countrymen. In seeking to accomplish this, he had to take a position towards history, understood both as event and representation: for history had become – to both his fellow Indians as well as to their colonial rulers – the most important resource from which theories and theoretical claims about subjection and freedom could be generated.

**T**he colonial rulers justified their position by invoking particular stories both about their own culture and about Indian civilization. So too, Gandhi's nationalist contemporaries discovered in history a useful resource to construct theories with which to oppose the British. Like the earlier generation of 19th century anti-colonial critics, the economic nationalists of the early 20th century, as well as men like Nehru, all steeped themselves in history, shaping it into a theoretical weapon against British rule. Gandhi, however, shared none of these historical preoccupations: neither as event nor as representation did history present itself as a theoretical resource for him. Why? What can explain the paradox of a figure who while himself so evidently 'making history' was yet so curiously disinterested in history?

As several interpreters have forcefully insisted, Gandhi spoke from outside the assumptions of mod-

ern or post-enlightenment thought. He gave centrality to personal experience as a source of values, and he rejected the Hegelian view of history as the 'self-realisation of self-perfecting reason' – whether embodied through the chosen vehicles of nations and cultures, individuals, or by forms of economic and political organisation (for instance, capitalism or liberal democracy). Gandhi challenged the idea of Universal History, that great ambition of the modern European intellect. He did this by relativising the claims of such history: by showing up its own propensities to tell stories, he undermined its ambition to de-mythologise the world.

**H**aving done that, he did not recur to the standard alternatives of historical pessimism or cultural relativism. He opened up the possibility of plural histories, all the while maintaining firm criteria by which to assess and judge such histories – something post-modernists are unable to do. Gandhi challenged the teleologies around which modernity has constructed itself by challenging the presumption of unilinear History (and thus, of ideas of progress). In doing this, he challenged the child-adult image of historical development and also the idea that the West was the 'centre', outside which trailed the non-western, colonised, or primitive societies.<sup>3</sup> Gandhi's evasion of the etiquette of historical thought profoundly disturbed the idea of history – an idea central to the modern West's self-conception.

As is true of any genuinely original thinker there is no single Gandhian thought or politics. Every interpretation of him must steer between the poles of sentimentalism and cynical dismissal. Perhaps the right question

2. Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993).

3. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

to ask is: 'What use can Gandhi be put to?' Most interpreters of Gandhi, where they have not simply deified or dismissed him have followed one of three strategies. Some have chosen to historicize him, seeing him essentially as a figure in the history of Indian nationalist politics; others have chosen to view him as a kind of anthropological or psychological curiosity, whose views and practices need to be translated into modern terms; while a third perspective has portrayed him as a political technologist, a purveyor of political techniques such as non-violent civil disobedience.

More recently, a fourth line of interpretation has emerged which sees him as the source of a still relevant critique of modernity and which has focused on Gandhi's criticism of the epistemic claims of modern rationality and science.<sup>4</sup> Almost all writing on Gandhi fumbles with the question of his 'relevance' today, a form of address which seems to be symptomatic of his oblivion; and of the fact that the body of writings somehow lack effective power in the absence of the man himself. Yet each of these interpretations misses the way in which his anachronistic historical presence or *habitus* was itself a form of criticism and action.

**G**andhi's understanding of the significance which representations of history had come to hold in the relations between colonised and coloniser was expressed most pointedly in *Hind Swaraj* (1909), his single-most sustained piece of writing. Running through the book was a polemical engagement with one of the central maxims of western historical con-

sciousness: *historia magistra vitae* – the idea that history and its representation in historical writing provided lessons, examples, even laws about the future of human action.<sup>5</sup> To the objections raised by the querulous interlocutor of *Hind Swaraj* that 'it has not occurred in history,' Gandhi replied that 'To believe that what has not occurred in history will not occur at all is to argue disbelief in the dignity of man.' 'History,' Gandhi insisted, 'is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul,' and it was only by kicking the English 'habit of writing history' that Indians could find the courage to release themselves from civilizational subjection.<sup>6</sup> This profound antipathy towards history and the burden of the past, so rare among those involved in nationalist politics, marks out just how distinctive both Gandhi's nationalism and his 'traditionalism' were.<sup>7</sup>

**Y**et Gandhi's rejection of the idea of historical progress did not signal the return to a pre-reflexive time of 'fate', an unmalleable world where human agency was reduced to insignificance. He stressed the opportunities of making and doing in the world – but equally, he was acutely sensitive to how that which was made or done cut itself free from the actor or author, and produced consequences that were

*Sciences* (New Delhi: Bookhive, 1970). While this line of criticism has produced some real and very useful insights, I doubt whether it is actually the most fruitful line to pursue.

5. A maxim formulated by Cicero, on the basis of Hellenistic historians like Polybius. See Reinhart Koselleck, 'Historia vitae magistra: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process', *Futures Past* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985).

6. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, op.cit, p 235.

7. There is of course a striking resonance here with Rabindranath Tagore's views: see his essay, 'The Course of Indian History' (1912).

unintended or unplanned. This is a perception that linear conceptions of history neglect and obscure, in favour of a view of a future where 'foresight, plan and execution would coincide seamlessly,' a future where precisely the end of history would be reached.<sup>8</sup> Although Gandhi did not repose any faith in this intellectual or technocratic view, he did not give up the idea of the 'makeability' of history.

**G**andhi's conviction that actions could not be reduced to their consequences can be traced to his understanding of both the Sankhya tradition of philosophy and the Bhagavad Gita. It allowed him to mount an attack on the utilitarian styles of thought which he believed dominated all modern activity. His dispute with utilitarianism turned not merely on a disagreement over whether moral action could be modelled by a means/ends calculus, but also, more significantly, on its conception of causality.

Utilitarianism assumed an atomistic picture of causality. But for Gandhi, one could not extract discrete cause-effect relations from the temporal flow of events and subject them to evaluation by the utilitarian calculus. This assumption was simplistic and self-delusive – anterior cause and future effect were intertwined not only with one another but with numerous other such chains, making it futile to entertain the belief that one could extract a single action and isolate its consequences from the intricate location of both in what was a densely populated field of cause and effect. Clearly, this view also bore upon conventional views of historical narrative and causation.

Linear conceptions of time which posit a continuum are, often

8. Koselleck, 'On the Disposability of History', *Futures Past*, op.cit., p. 207.

despite themselves and to their embarrassment, constituted by events which mark a rupture or discontinuity with the past. Such punctual moments often take the form of revolution (most obviously, 1789), war, or independence. These are events which can be used to represent a point of origin and to orient future history along a particular axis. But as Gandhi saw it, such ideas of history as linear progress were intrinsically linked to conflict and violence. Hence, for teleological thinkers such as Hegel and Marx, war or civil war (in the form of class conflict) served as the fundamental dynamic of historical progress. It was such teleological commitments which placed modern civilization perpetually in the shadow of catastrophe: trammelled by linear time, modern civilization was in Gandhi's image like an express train moving relentlessly forward towards disaster.<sup>9</sup>

**G**andhi did not *trust* history. History and politics were for him fundamentally domains of agency, and in order to operate within them, one could not trust in the invocation of an external principle (for example, the idea of progress, or capitalism, or democracy: adherents of such principles believed they would somehow resolve the perplexities of human agency). In order to act under conditions of uncertainty and contingency, one had to have immovable and publicly visible principles. Nothing else could reduce the hazards of political agency and establish a modicum of predictability and trust between agents. It was up to individual human beings to create for themselves relations of trust between one another. History would not do it for them. Gandhi's insistence on this derived from his sensitivity to the

ways in which an easy faith in progress served to dull awareness of our collective capacity to produce disasters.

**T**he point is not that Gandhi had no sense of history, nor that he was bound to a 'Hindu' cyclical view.<sup>10</sup> He had a very acute sense of history, but he self-consciously positioned himself outside debates framed in terms that appointed history a repository of theoretical knowledge and laws. It would have been impossible for anyone in Indian nationalist politics to ignore history – which, both as event and as representation, had since the late 19th century become an unavoidable terrain of conflict, and all political actors had to align themselves with some reading of it.<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi saw the extent to which both as reality and as narration history was subject to distortion by power, and could not therefore be a repository of epistemic truths nor a domain of cognitive disinterest. The deeper historical roots of this attitude might be seen to lie in the doctrines of the classical schools of Indian philosophy, none of which recognised history as a *pramana*, that is, as a source of cognitive knowledge, but rather viewed it as a species of inference or verbal testimony.<sup>12</sup>

There were various ways available to disturb the claims of the historical narratives of the colonizers: one could produce alternative histories

which precisely played up their own fictional character, one could reveal empirical inaccuracies in British history, or one could adopt critical positions which remained internal to the western tradition of historical self-consciousness (such as socialism and Marxism). Or one could, as Gandhi chose to do, play with historical events and their representation through gestures and actions. Gandhi, through his comportment and actions, conflated different historical and temporal planes, so drawing attention to the vacuousness of all claims that history progressed by a steady movement from barbarism to civilization, tradition to modernity, religious to secular, or from colonisation to independence.

**E**very one of Gandhi's words and gestures were designed to reveal how each of these predicaments contained elements of their supposed negation. The present, the contemporary was a constant reworking and reinterpretation of the past, and perpetually haunted by it. As Lutz Neithammer has noted, 'the Achilles' heel of the philosophy of history is the present,' and Gandhi made it his task to exploit this to the full.<sup>13</sup>

To understand something of Gandhi's complex historical playfulness, it is perhaps helpful to briefly locate him in the context of Indian nationalism. This not in order to historicize him, but rather to notice his capacity to constitute and address different audiences, each operating with differing temporalities. When Gandhi entered Indian nationalist politics, he found a fundamental split in the self-understandings and forms of anti-colonial action. This division has been noticed by subsequent interpreters in different ways: some have spoken of a split between modernist and

9. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 1, op.cit., p. 282 and p. 290.

10. Cf. Sheldon Pollock, 'Mimamsa and the Problem of History in Traditional India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 109, no. 4 (1989), pp. 603-610.

11. Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), chapter 4.

12. See J.N. Mohanty, 'Philosophy of History and its Presuppositions' in T.M.P. Mahadevan and G. Cairns (eds.), *Contemporary Indian Philosophers of History* (Calcutta: World Press, 1977), p. 251.

13. *Posthistoire* (London: Verso, 1993) p. 62.

*dharmic* idioms, others of a divide between elite and subaltern. Broadly, and speaking in shorthand, the nationalist movement was divided in two, between the newly created class of western educated intellectuals, for whom history and historical consciousness was an obsession and who disputed colonial domination on the terrain of and by means of history, and a 'subaltern' world, involved in a pattern of local, sporadic, but often very acute rebellions against the colonial state. This subaltern world was populated by groups 'without' history, in the sense that their being in the world did not involve a consciousness of a history which belonged exclusively to them, and which was constitutive of their collective selves and their capacities for action.

**G**andhi also faced another division in nationalist politics, between Hindu and Muslim interpretations of the political community. This is a complex matter, and I can only briefly signal it here. Gandhi clearly did have a notion of *Ramrajya*, a harmonious social and political order located outside of history; but he did not posit a mythic origin point of unity and harmony, nor did he see such harmony as located in some future resolution, where 'real nationalism' (as Nehru called it in *The Discovery of India*) would unite all Indians on the basis of a fusion of economic interests. Rather, his constant emphasis was on how a harmony of interests had to be achieved now, in the present.

It is difficult to find a vantage-point where Gandhi's diverse meanings and actions can be unified (here, one faces a complicated question about the coherence of Gandhi's life and thought – a coherence which he himself desired). But it was perhaps in Gandhi's own person, his bodily presence and actions, that some of

these diverse strands came together. He showed remarkable skill in manipulating temporality. He staged politics as a dramatic performance, well before the age of mass media: fasts, marches, silences, trials and imprisonment, were all ways of constituting an audience, uniting a community around an immediate spectacle.

**I**f, as Benedict Anderson has insisted, the newspaper was one crucial way of joining unconnected people together into an 'empty time' necessary to imagine the political community of the nation, so too were the spectacular dramas Gandhi staged.<sup>14</sup> They served at once both to frame an 'empty time', and to infuse life into popular imaginings of a mythic time punctuated by the appearance of saintly figures.<sup>15</sup>

Gandhi himself was of course fully fluent in the forensic skills necessary to work the British colonial legal and administrative order. But while he was fully and quite subtly literate, he had the astuteness never to forget what it was like to be illiterate – something most intellectuals would forget, but a vital remembrance in a country where the overwhelming majority were non-literates. This enabled him to build up command over a secondary language of material actions. Whether on trial or in prison, marching or spinning, fasting or observing silence, Gandhi *staged* these episodes: they were not endured merely to develop personal fortitude in the face of suffering. They had the peculiar paranthetic temporality of theatrical drama, which allows play with tem-

poral references to past and present. They were the mode whereby he created a radically novel public domain in Indian politics.

By engaging in such apparently outmoded historical practices as fasts and silences, processional marches, wearing a *dhori*, or weaving his own cloth, Gandhi discovered a powerful resource to infuse symbolic meanings into the world of high politics.<sup>16</sup> This helped connect high politics to the vocabulary of meanings which constituted the non-literate world, thus enabling the non-literate to enter and act within the political sphere. This pageant-like character of Gandhi's life and discourse was something that George Orwell – who otherwise was temperamentally so repelled by Gandhi – saw well when he observed that 'his whole life was a sort of pilgrimage in which every act was significant.'<sup>17</sup>

**A**lthough Gandhi was one of the most innovative political figures of the 20th century, he refused to portray himself as breaking with the past, tradition. He did not present himself as an originator, breaking radically with a monolithic and corrupt past. Rather he drew out the heterogeneity of Indian tradition, the presence within it of self-quarrelling elements, and in this way tried to eliminate the jarring elements and so make it more coherent.<sup>18</sup> One also finds this stress on continuity as opposed to rupture in his

16. For a discussion of the role of royal processional marches in medieval India, and for some suggestive analogies between this and the discourse of national progress and development in post-Independence India, see R. Inden, 'Embodying God: From Imperial Progresses to Progress in India', *Economy and Society*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 245-278.

17. 'Reflections on Gandhi', in *Shooting the Elephant* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949)

18. J.N. Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in*

14. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 25 ff.

15. See Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma', *Subaltern Studies III* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).

understanding of the West and its impact on India. Modernity, processes of modernization and secularisation, were not – as they tended by preference to describe themselves – total breaks with a tradition-bound and religious past: rather they represented a constant reworking of traditional elements. Such elements of the religious past remained active and potentially able to ferment the present, so endowing it with new shape.

**S**o too, the subjection of India's traditional past to the British colonial version of modernity was not something achieved by a specific episode or event – say, Plassey. Rather, it had occurred through a slow, almost imperceptible seduction of the Indians by the 'baubles and trinkets' of the incoming commercial society. Most significantly, Gandhi insisted that it could not be seen to have happened at the political level – it was not the 'Indian state' (whatever that might be) which had capitulated to the British one, but a deeper civilizational subjection which had taken place. Hence genuine swaraj, self-rule, could never be simply a political issue: political independence was not enough to achieve it.

It was this perception of the porousness of temporal planes and causalities which fed his anachronism as a way of being in the world. As he tried to explain to Nehru in 1945, it was precisely the fact that the past was behind us, was ancient, yet continued into the modern world, that endowed it with value: 'While I appreciate modern thought. I find that an ancient thing considered in the light of this thought, looks so sweet.'<sup>19</sup> The ancient took on value and became attractive precisely

*Indian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 275.

19. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, op.cit., vol. I, p. 286.

by its existence in the other time of the modern! It was this reframing which endowed value to the ancient. It was the special meanings and values generated by playing with such discrepancies which interested Gandhi. Thus, the Hindu and Buddhist epics gained a novel power precisely by being relocated and interpreted outside of their initial context, in the light of quite modern or contemporary political and moral concerns. Self-conscious anachronism, the wilful neglect of historical proprieties about what was past and what was contemporary, became in Gandhi's hands a sophisticated and powerful political weapon. Gandhi found an alternative political repertoire in traditions and in the past, which he skilfully reassembled into innovative contemporary forms. Needless to say, such plays with anachronism can of course have far less benign effects – witness India today.

**G**andhi's studied anachronism was a way of disturbing conventions about what defined and constituted the present or the contemporary, modernity itself. Instead of accepting modernity's own self-description that it marked a decisive break with what came before, Gandhi preferred to show ways in which the past seeped into the present, thus dissolving what were thought to be historical inevitabilities. He had an extraordinary capacity to tear through historical fixities and solidities, primarily, I think, because he understood so well the role of belief and consciousness in politics. He saw politics as fundamentally a struggle to make and unmake selves, individual and collective character. In this struggle he made use of the repertoire of history, but in quite unexpected ways, to reveal how it could never come to an end – for there was no single story which was being told.

# Backpage

WE are in for a long gloomy winter. And this time around the blame is not all El Niño's. A recessionary business environment, a lameduck government, and the impending 12th Lok Sabha elections which none seem to want is unlikely to lift spirits, notwithstanding New Year revelries.

But while the knowledgeable busy themselves with their favourite excitement, psephology, thousands of workers in the national capital wearily prepare themselves for deepening penury. All of us doomed to live in this historical city are aware that Delhi is one of the most dangerously polluted environs in the world. The CSE and its crusading Director, Anil Agarwal, has dinned this into our sub-conscious.

So when M.C. Mehta, our latest Magsaysay award winning environmental lawyer in conjunction with green Judge Kuldeep Singh ensured a Supreme Court order for relocating thousands of polluting industries outside the National Capital Region, there was much praise and relief. For once, the court had placed the concern of citizens—suffering from numerous pollution related disorders—in the centre.

So far so good. When queried about the workers who stood to lose their jobs, the normal refrain was: 'Oh! They will be provided adequate compensation. Also, orders have been passed which compel relocating firms to re-employ them, if necessary after providing new training. There is a temporary cost that the owners and workers will have to bear in the interest of society. Overall, the public good far outweighs the cost.'

Little do we realise that the cost, the 'temporary discomfort' is invariably borne by our poorer brethren. A survey of 100 firms carried out one year after the Supreme Court pronouncement revealed that *no compensation had been paid to any worker* in total disregard of the Supreme Court order. The only exception was one public sector textile concern. In the rare case wherein a factory announced plans of relocation, invariably to far off sites, the workers were not informed. Expectedly, many industries had begun a prior process of retrenchment in anticipation of the judgement. And worse, some factories even managed to continue production by challenging the criteria for selecting polluting units.

The assumption that orders, even judicial orders, have both thought through the implications and have 'planned' to mitigate the negative externalities is deeply flawed. Planning in these market-friendly days

is at a deep discount. And our courts, known for their zeal in overseeing the administration in pursuing investigations against corrupt politicians, plead helplessness and ignorance in cases where their guidelines for compensation and re-employment are flouted.

One wishes that these worthies had attended the public hearings on the mass displacement of workers organised by the Delhi Janwadi Adhikar Manch, a forum constituted by nearly two score democratic organisations. The stories of the thousands of workers and their families might have made them realise that knee-jerk pronouncements, even when well-intentioned, can result in untold misery.

Our case is not just that the state in India is withering away, with the left arm not knowing what the right is doing. Nor the oft-stated maxim about the class bias of our government. Nor even that our 'cushioned' elite suffers from a myopia when it comes to cognizing the poor and their problems. It is that we, the decision-makers, seem congenitally predisposed to increasing the miseries of the poor.

When Elizabeth II, the British (and our!) Queen remarked on the filthy state of Delhi, the administration, stung to the quick, moved rapidly to remove dozens of pavement markets. The appeal, in addition to aesthetics, was on improving traffic flow, providing space for pedestrians, even removing health hazards. And, it was claimed, alternative market sites would be provided. The operative phrase is 'would be'. Why this could not be done *prior* to the demolitions with the help of the Rapid Action Force is, I suspect, no mystery.

Any impression that this process is unique to Delhi can be countered by numerous similar instances from across the country. There is no doubt that we need stricter environmental legislation, and implementation. The issues are: who pays the cost; can these interventions be better planned; and, above all, why are these processes not transparent and democratic such that concerned citizens can demand accountability?

It should thus cause no surprise that at times like these the Malthusian imperative reigns supreme. In Rajasthan, orders have been issued for a resumption of mass sterilisation camps. That such a move can be initiated in the run-up to general elections demonstrates the irrelevance of the poor to the calculations of real-politik. If you can't get rid of poverty, at least get rid of the poor!

Harsh Sethi



# Index

## SEMINAR ISSUES 1997

SEMINAR 449: January 1997; **INDIA 1996**: a symposium on the year that was.

<b>Baru, Sanjaya</b>	Indian enterprise
<b>Batliwala, Srilatha</b>	Empowering women
<b>Bhatia, Gautam</b>	Kaliyug
<b>Das, Arvind N.</b>	Honour among thieves
<b>Dasgupta, Swapan</b>	India: a nice place to get out of
<b>Debroy, Bibek</b>	India's external sector
<b>Friese, Kai</b>	Local geography
<b>Goswami, Omkar</b>	Basta!
<b>Guzder, Cyrus</b>	Life in the death of our cities
<b>Karnad, Bharat</b>	Cooking our goose
<b>Katyal, Anjum</b>	Domesticating violence
<b>Khare, Harish</b>	Disorderly politics of a new order
<b>Khurshid, Salman</b>	Judges in a democracy
<b>Ninan, T.N.</b>	The year of the bear
<b>Rangarajan, Mahesh</b>	The politics of transition
<b>Roy, Aruna, Nikhil Dey</b>	
<b>and Shanker Singh</b>	Demanding accountability
<b>Sainath, P.</b>	Watershed elections
<b>Sanghvi, Vir</b>	The new intolerance

<b>Varshney, Ashutosh</b>	Three master narratives of Indian politics
<b>Visvanathan, Shiv</b>	May day, May day

SEMINAR 450: February 1997; **THE STATE OF BIHAR**: a symposium on the legacy of a troubled state.

<b>Bhatia, Bela</b>	Anatomy of a massacre
<b>Das, Arvind N.</b>	Para-banking and para-politics
<b>Gupta, Shajbal</b>	The enigma that is Bihar economy
<b>Hauser, Walter</b>	Changing images of caste and politics
<b>Jha, Hetukar</b>	A land called Mithila
<b>Lal, A.K.</b>	Bihar: old and new
<b>Mishra, Pankaj</b>	The problem
<b>Mukherjee, Meenakshi</b>	Who is a Bihari?
<b>Sachchidananda</b>	The changing village
<b>Singh, Ashok K.</b>	Interview with Chaturan Mishra
<b>Sinha, Arun</b>	Shadows of the poltergeists
<b>Sinha, Nikesh</b>	Bihar revisited
<b>Sinha-Kerkhoff, Kathinka</b>	Are Biharis uneducated?

SEMINAR 451: March 1997; **DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT**: a symposium on the social impact of our development choices.

Anitha, S.	A communitarian response
Baviskar, Amita	Who speaks for the victims?
Banerjee, Sumanta	Development projects and human rights
Berlin, Sir Isaiah	The freedom of choice (Interview by Jyotirmaya Sharma)
Ghosh, Sailendra Nath	A new paradigm
Hazarika, Sanjoy	Lessons from Bhopal
Jain, L.C.	Strengthening the foundations
Jayal, Niraja Gopal	The problem
Kumar, Krishna	A memory for democracy
Mehta, Ajay S.	Politics of voluntary action
Panchu, Sriram	In the public interest
Swaminadhan, Srilata	The neo-missionaries
Tandon, Rajesh	Grassroots democracy

SEMINAR 452: April 1997; **WORKERS AND UNIONS**: a symposium on the challenges facing labour organisations.

Bardhan, A.B.	Looking to the future
Bhowmik, Sharit K.	On worker takeovers
Jhabvala, Renana	Wages for unorganised labour
Mazumdar, Indrani and Subodh Varma	A divided city
Nigam, Aditya	The problem
Raman, A. Thothathri	A bumpy road ahead
Roy, Dunu	Liberalising labour
Satgar, Vishwas	Democratisation at an impasse
Sharma, Mukul	An end and a beginning
Singh, Rustam	Ontology of wage labour
Sushila	My story

SEMINAR 453: May 1997; **SYMBOLIC SPACES**: a symposium on media, text and design.

Bright, Kristy	Cool, cool beverage
Butcher, Melissa	Looking at Miss World
Chandra, Nandini	Market life of Amar Chitra Katha
DeNeve, Rose	Tourism and the imperial gaze
Geetha, V.	Two heroes of our times
Goswami, Urmi A.	Popular momances
Seminarist	The problem
Sundaram, Ravi	Technofutures
Visvanathan, Shiv	Gandhi goes to NID

SEMINAR 454: June 1997; **POLITICAL EXHAUSTION**: a symposium on some issues facing our polity.

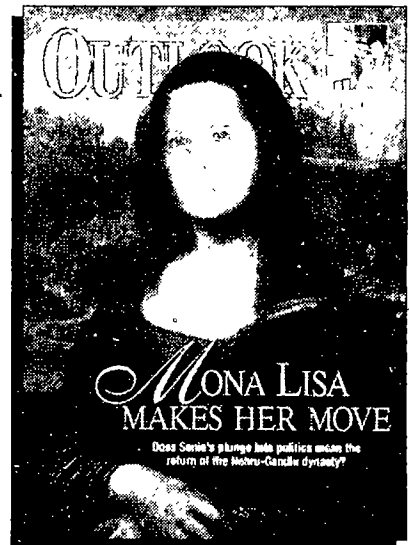
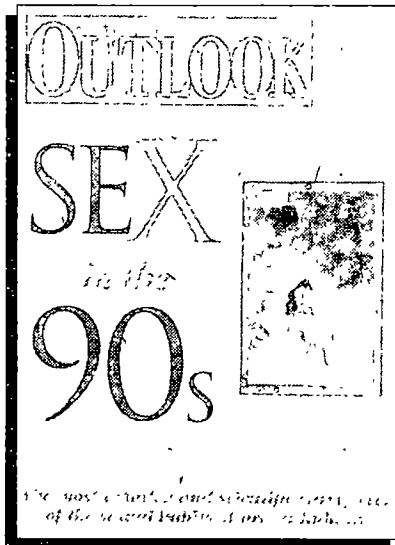
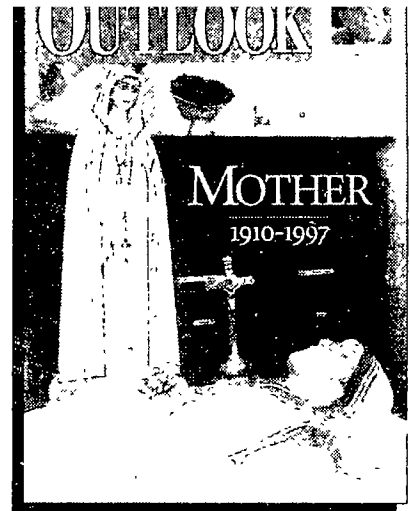
Alam, Javeed	Nation and the regions
Bhargava, Rajeev	Why we must retain the majority-minority framework
Chakravarty, Kumaresh	A third front
Chatterjee, Manini	Left politics
Dutt, Barkha	The camera has two faces
Dutta, Bhaskar	In search of political stability
Gadgil, V.N.	What ails the Congress (Interview by Rajdeep Sardesai)
Gupta, Kanchan	Federal anarchy
Misra, Amaresh	Beyond coalition politics
Misra, Udayon	Limits of regional sectarianism
Mitra, Chandan	Unholy alliances
Parthasarathy, Malini	A defining moment
Reddy, Jaipal	Political continuity (Interview by Ashok Singh)
Seminarist	The problem

SEMINAR 455: July 1997; **ALTERNATIVES IN COMMUNICATION**: a symposium on mediums, innovations and practices.

Akerkar, Supriya	Feminist voices
Deshpande, Sudhanva	Of consumers and kings
Dogra, Bharat	Writer in the field (Interview by Deepti P. Mehrotra)
Forum for Independent Film and Video	Beyond commercial logic
Hamid and Bodhuram	The kalakar as puppet (Interview by Vibodh Parthasarathi)
Lal, Anupa	Writing for children
Murthy, N.V.K.	An overview
Pande, Ira	In praise of rumour
Parthasarathi, Vibodh	The problem
Rao, Vidya	Silence
Sangvai, Sanjay	Movements; media and mediations
Sarkar, Satyajit and Sharad Agarwal	Using the video

SEMINAR 456: August 1997; **RETHINKING INSTITUTIONS**: a symposium on state, civil society and mediating structures.

Acharya, Ashok	Civil society and liberal norms
Blomkvist, Hans	Caste and democracy



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<b>Ilajah, Kancha</b>	Gaddar: embodying many institutions
<b>Krishna, Daya</b>	Building intellectual traditions (Interview by Shail Mayaram)
<b>Mathur, Kuldeep</b>	University under siege
<b>Mohapatra, Bishnu N.</b>	The problem
<b>Pandya, Sunil K.</b>	Public hospitals
<b>Rao, M.A. Vasudeva</b>	The Udupi Madhva Matha
<b>Reddy, Amulya</b>	
<b>Kumar N.</b>	Ensuring sustainability
<b>Saberwal, Satish</b>	Political parties and societal values
<b>Seminarist</b>	Cleaning up

SEMINAR 457: September 1997; **EMPOWERING WOMEN**: a symposium on political reservations for women.

<b>Al-Tamimi, Jumana.</b>	Arab women and politics
<b>Alva, Margaret</b>	Whither Indian women?
<b>Bhattacharya, Malini</b>	Democracy and reservation
<b>Dhagamwar, Vasudha</b>	Reservations about further reservation
<b>Mazumdar, Vina</b>	Historical soundings
<b>Menon, Nivedita</b>	Reservations and representation
<b>Nair, Janaki</b>	An important springboard
<b>Ramanathan, Usha</b>	Interrogating WRB 1996
<b>Singhvi, Abhishek M.</b>	The women's reservation bill
<b>Seminarist</b>	The problem

SEMINAR 458: October 1997; **MEDIA TRENDS**: a symposium on the press and TV in our times.

<b>Babani, Anoop</b>	Index on media
<b>Bhattacharjea, Ajit</b>	The problem
<b>Ghose, Sagarika</b>	The free market journalist
<b>Jeffrey, Robin</b>	Indian-language newspapers
<b>Jesudasan, Tony</b>	Media as commerce
<b>Jha, Raj Kamal</b>	The fault, dear Brutus
<b>Nicoll, Alexander</b>	Codes of conduct
<b>Prasad, H.Y. Sharada</b>	Down memory lane
<b>Sainath, P.</b>	Amnesia
<b>Sanghvi, Vir</b>	The dispensable editor
<b>Sethi, Harsh</b>	Activist journals
<b>Singh, Malvika</b>	TV tales
<b>Varma, Arun</b>	Business journalism

SEMINAR 459: November 1997; **UNITY OR INCOHERENCE**: a symposium on emerging issues in center-state relations.

<b>Banerjee, Ashis</b>	The federal coalition
<b>Baruah, Sanjib</b>	Cutting states to size
<b>Frankel, Francine R.</b>	The problem
<b>Radin, Beryl A.</b>	Instruments of federalism
<b>Singh, Nirvikar</b>	On federalism and reform in India
<b>Srivastava, D.K.</b>	Emerging fiscal and economic issues
<b>Stepan, Alfred</b>	Comparative democratic federalism
<b>Verney, Douglas V.</b>	A more federal India?

SEMINAR 560: December 1997; **FUTURES**: a symposium on critiques of dominant futures studies.

<b>Cubitt, Sean</b>	The art of the future
<b>Inayatullah, Sohail</b>	Evading the future eaters
<b>Lal, Vinay</b>	The future of knowledge
<b>May, Graham H.</b>	A surprise free future?
<b>Nandy, Ashis</b>	The future of dissent
<b>Pieterse, Jan Nederveen</b>	Global futures
<b>Sardar, Ziauddin</b>	The problem

#### FURTHER READING

<b>Davies, Merryl Wyn</b>	Futures
<b>Gulati, Sunita</b>	Democracy and Development
_____	Political Exhaustion
_____	The State of Bihar
_____	Unity or Incoherence
<b>Nigam, Aditya</b>	Workers and Unions
<b>Parthasarathi, V.</b>	Alternatives in Communication
<b>Seminarist</b>	Media Trends
_____	Rethinking Institutions
_____	Symbolic Spaces
<b>Vyas, Anju</b>	Empowering Women

#### COMMENT

<b>Agnivesh, Swami</b>	The Hindu view of a multi-religious society (December '97)
<b>Allis, Trevor</b>	Environment and ethics (December '97)
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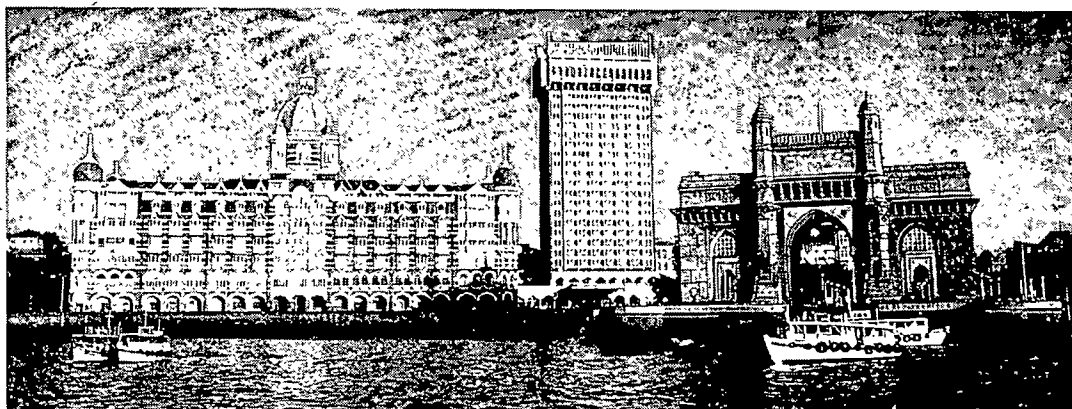
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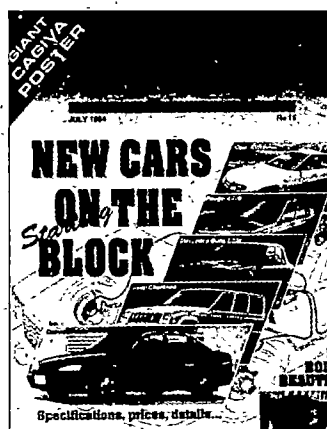
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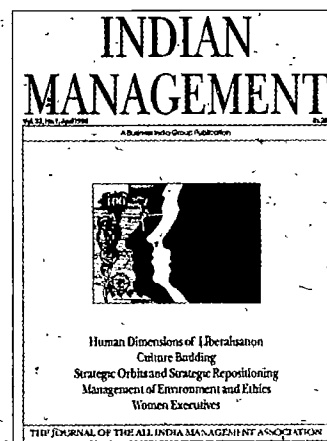
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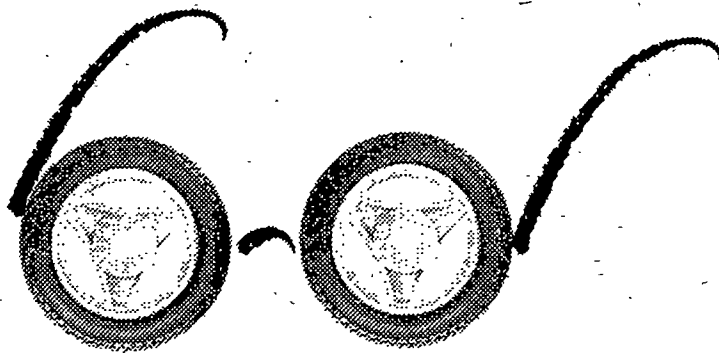
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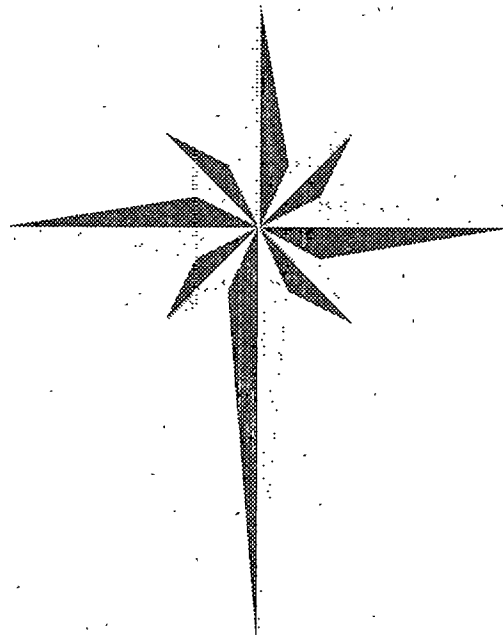
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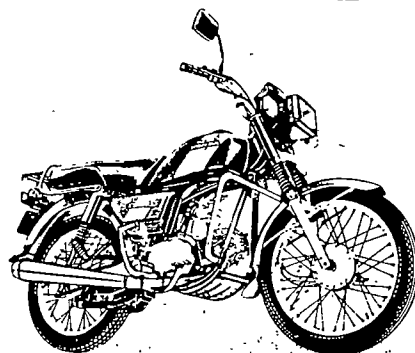


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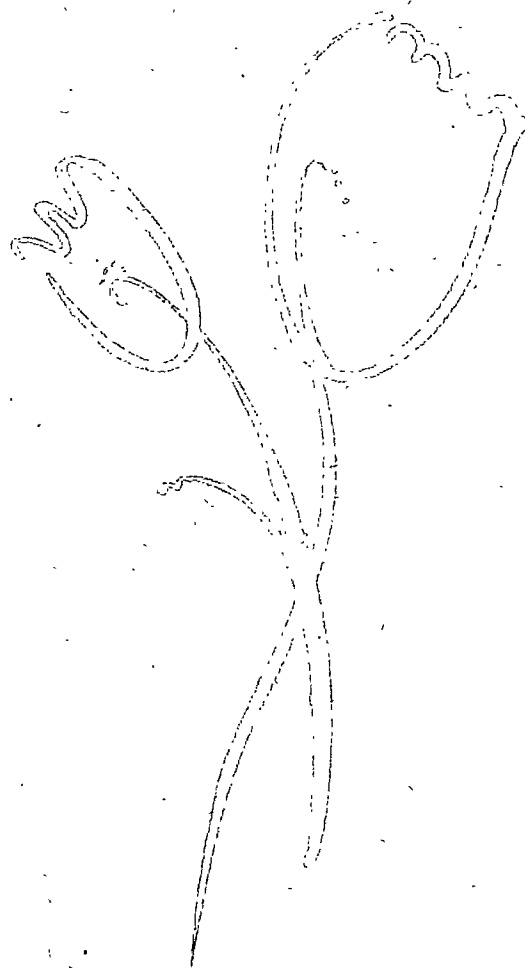
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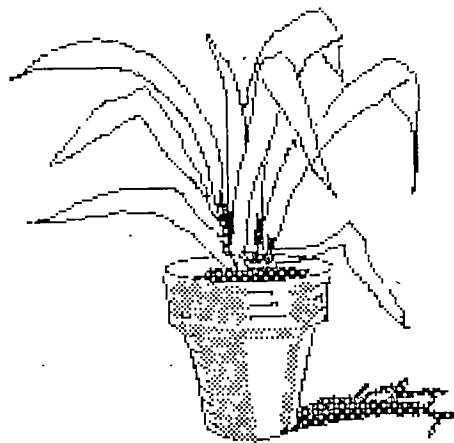
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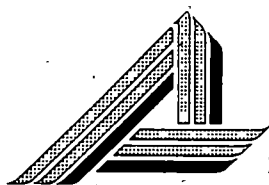
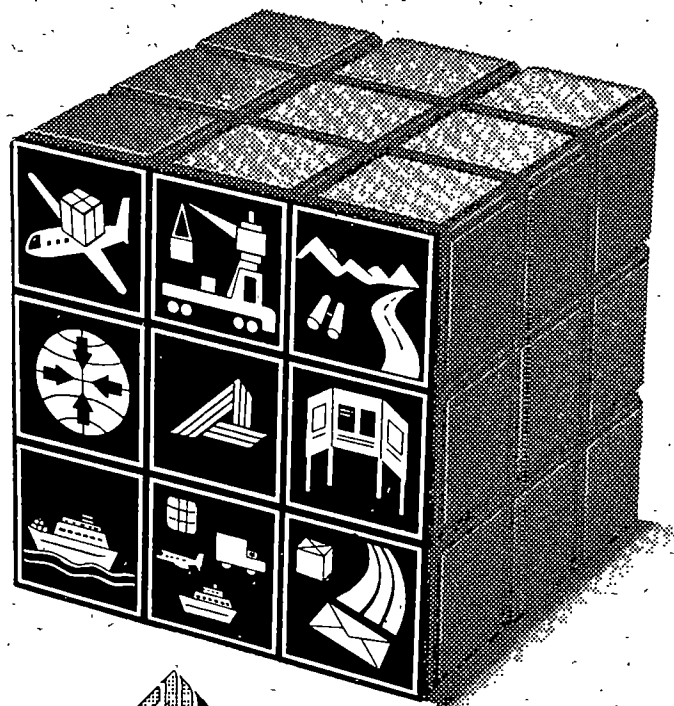


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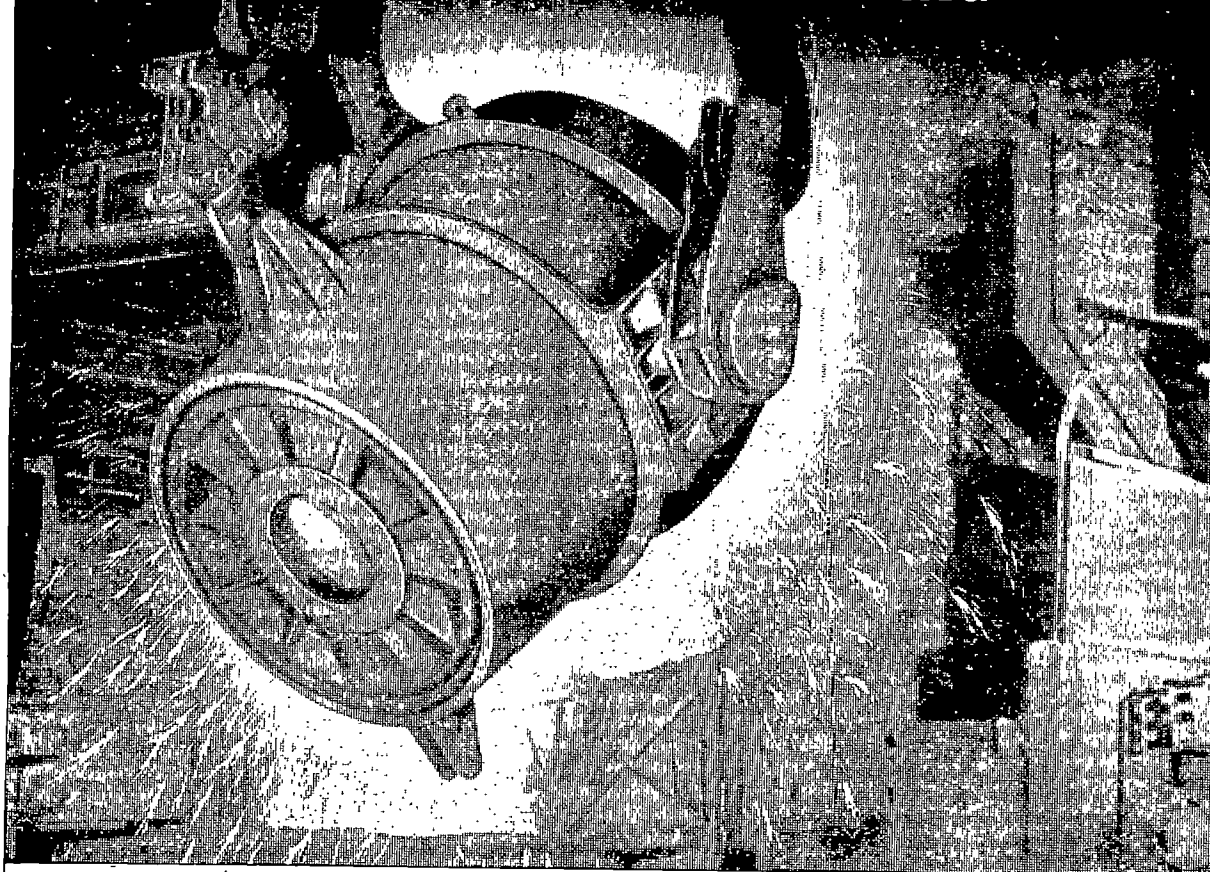
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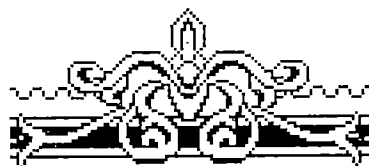
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**POWER  
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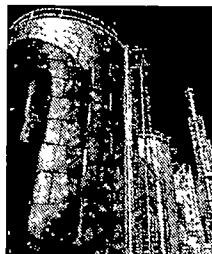
- \* Ringgold Cogeneration Plant in Pennsylvania, USA, designed and built by Wartsila NSD Corporation for Cogentrix, a leading IPP in the USA. This base load station uses natural gas for normal operation and has the flexibility to switch to liquid fuel when required.

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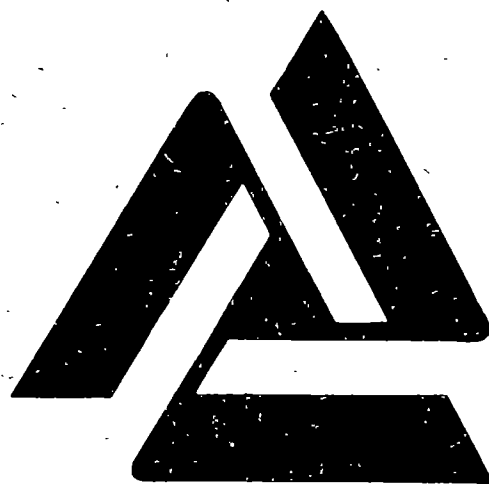


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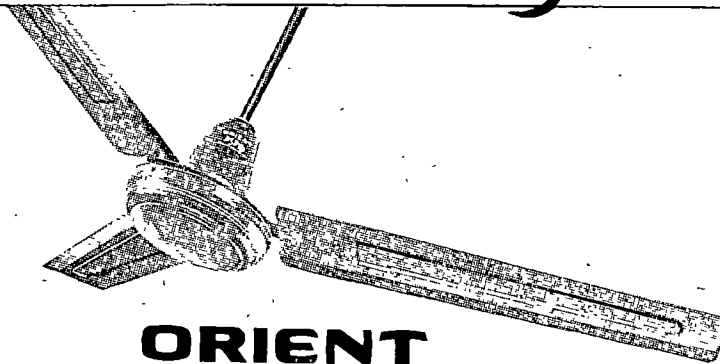
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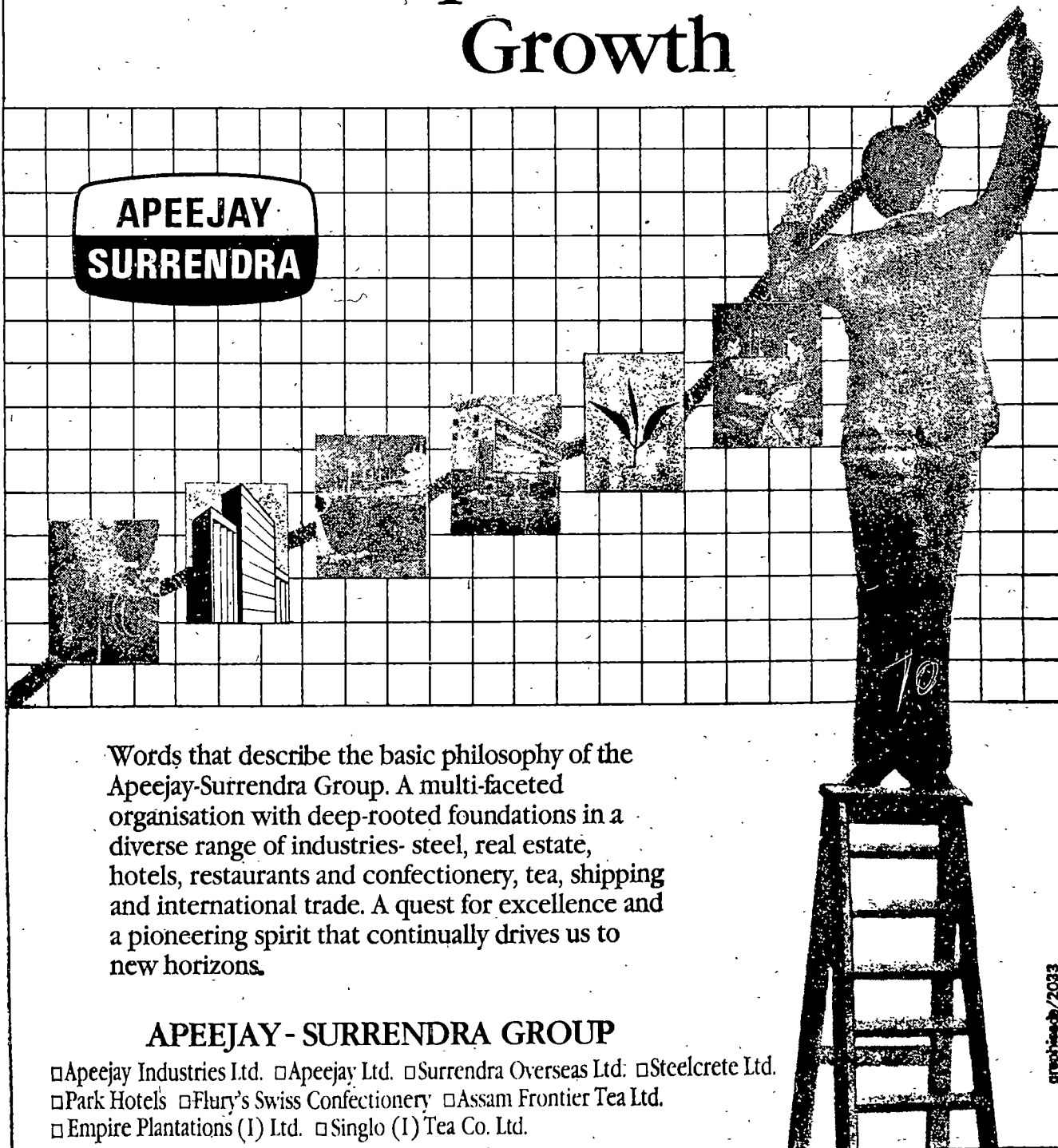
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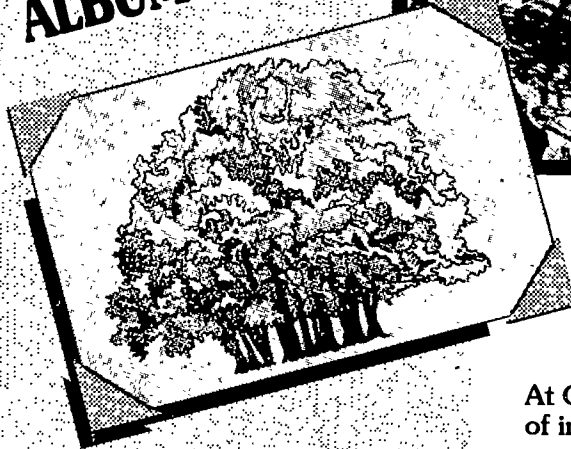
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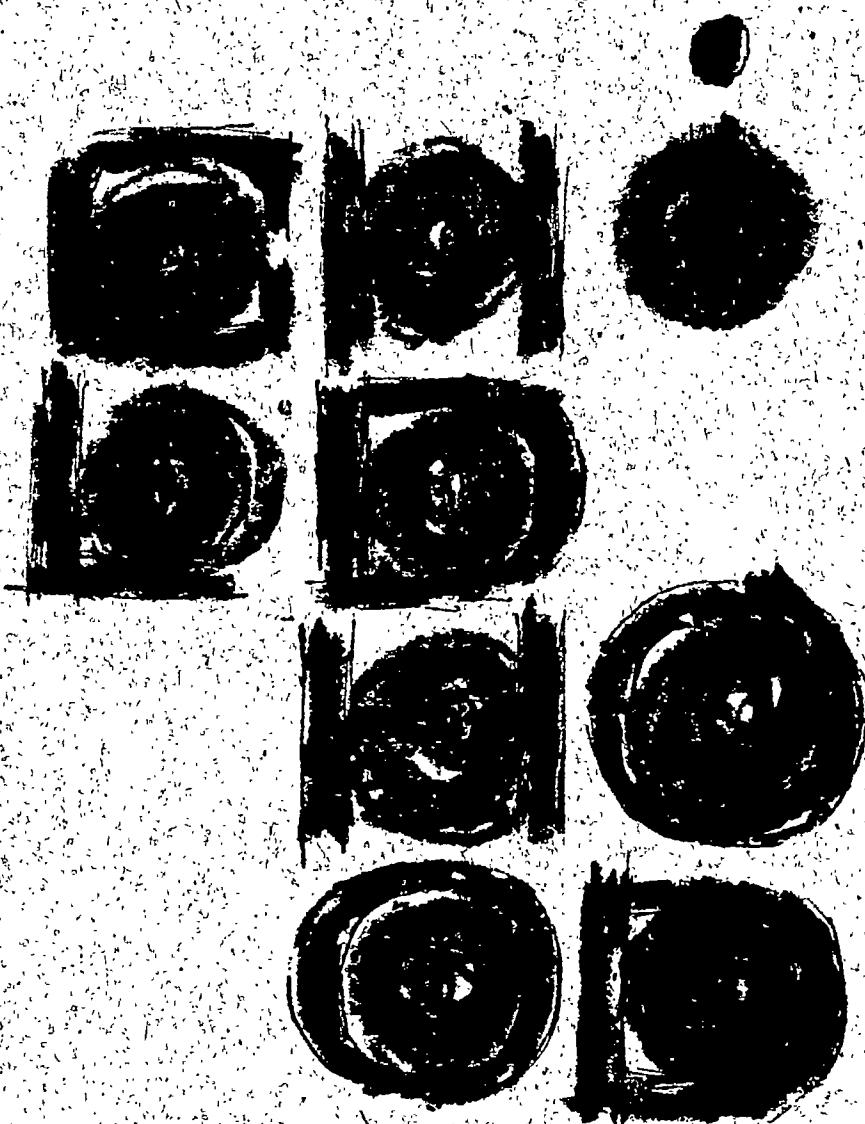
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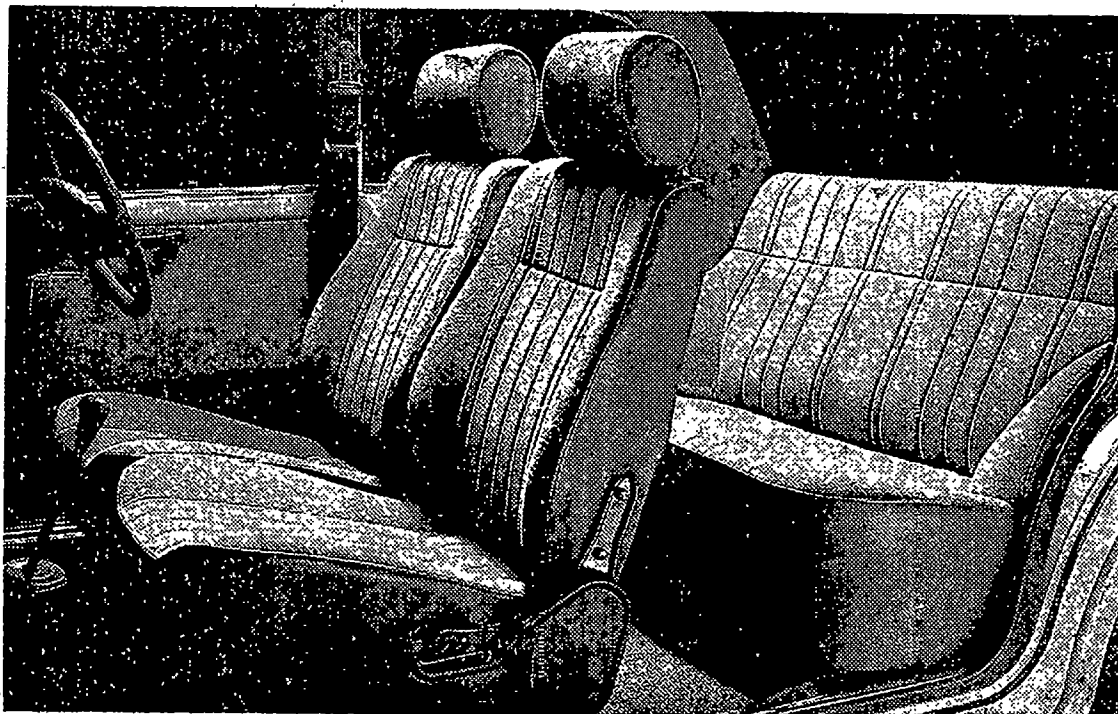
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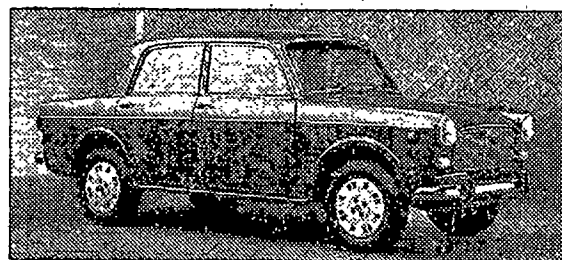
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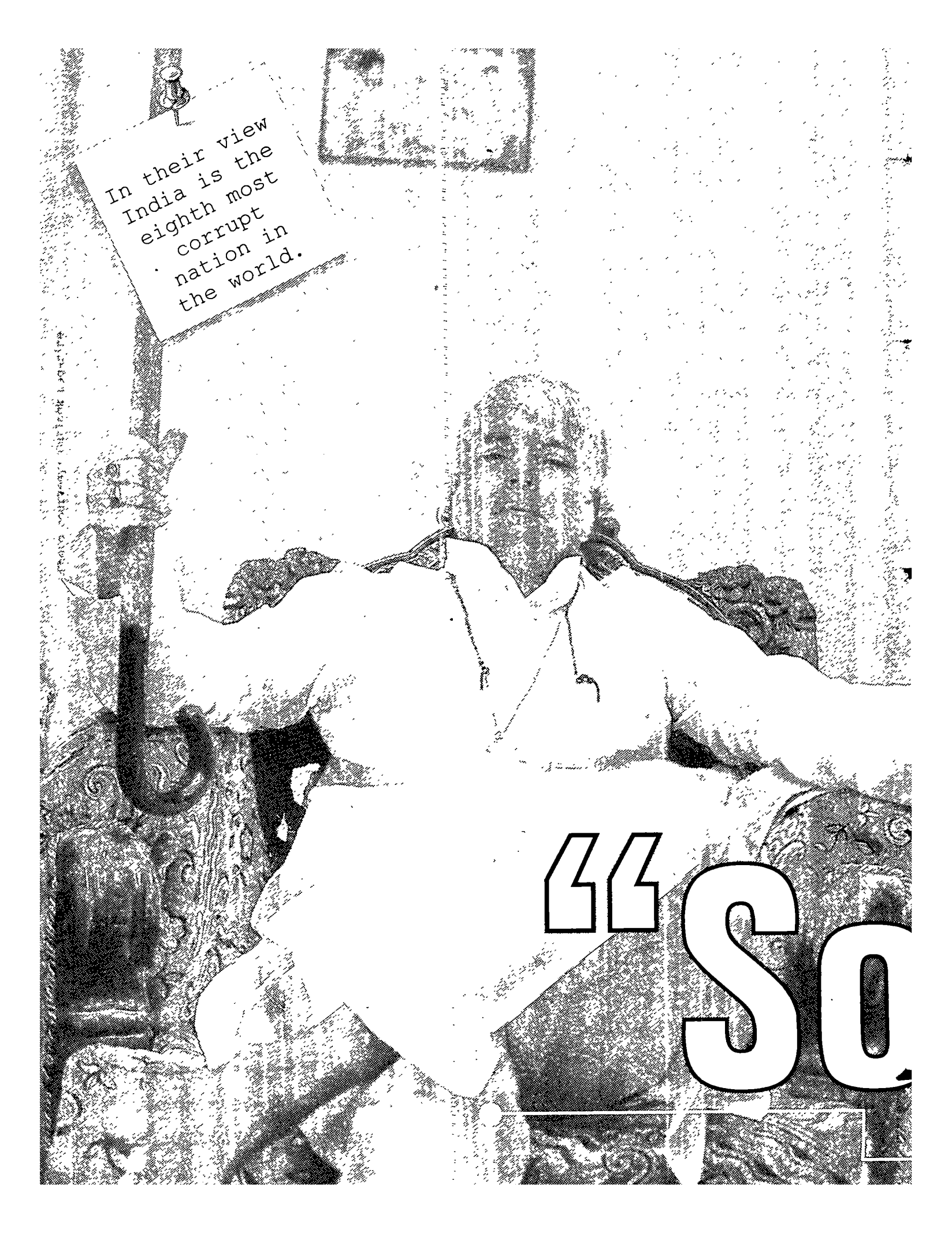
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Sweet Memories



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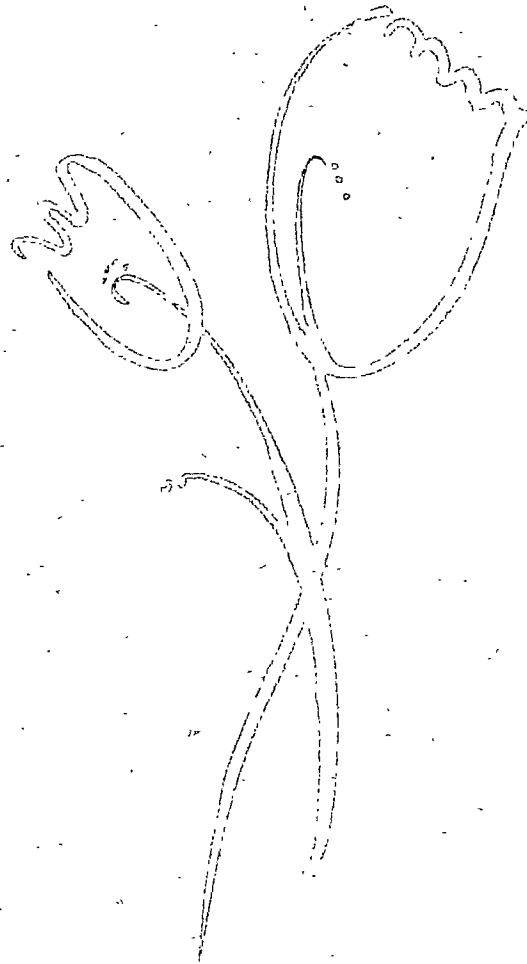
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We take as much care of the beds in the garden  
as we do of the ones in your room.



At Oberoi Hotels, we have a very simple philosophy when it comes to the environment.

We return to the earth, everything we take from it.

It is this belief that we put to practice before we design and build any of our hotels around the world.

Because we believe that we are living on land leased from nature.



Oberoi Hotels in Australia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka.

This is 3 year old Shreya.  
Her parents abandoned her  
and vanished. If you turn the page,  
you'll do the same.



CAUSE  
CÉLEBRE Created by Contract for a cause.

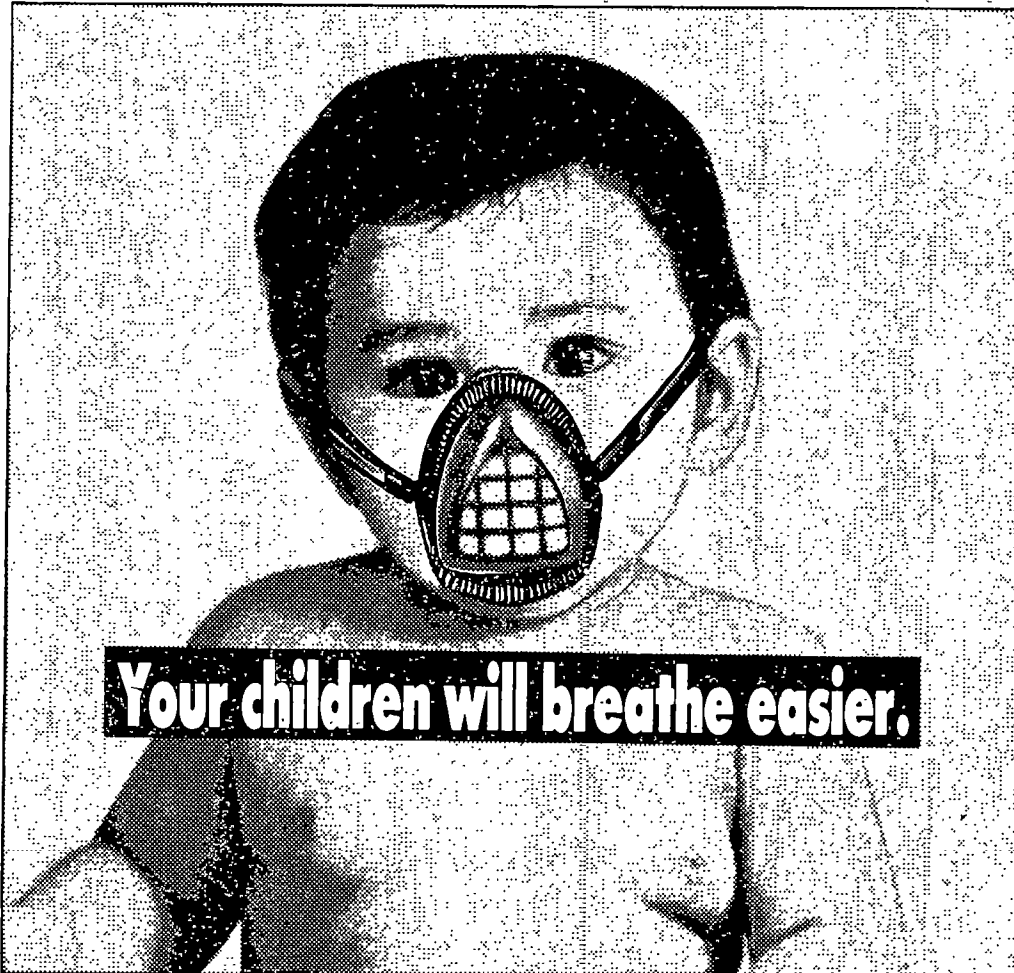
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**Nanhi kali**

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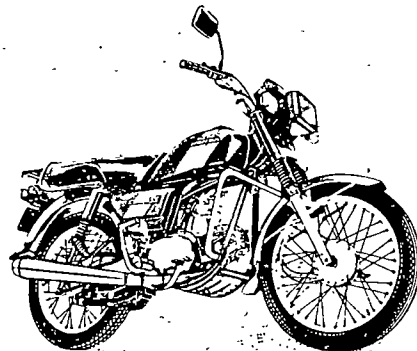


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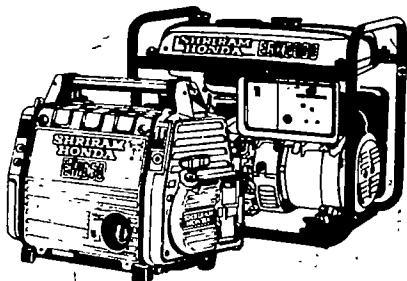
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# seminar

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a journal which seeks to reflect through free discussion, every shade of Indian thought and aspiration. Each month, a single problem is debated by writers belonging to different persuasions. Opinions expressed have ranged from janata to congress, from sarvodaya to communist to independent. And

the non-political specialist too has voiced his views. In this way it has been possible to answer a real need of today, gather the facts and ideas of this age and to help thinking people arrive at a certain degree of cohesion and clarity in facing the problems of economics, of politics, of culture.

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## NEXT MONTH: REFUGEES

# 462

## CHILDHOOD

a symposium on

early childhood care

and education

symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
Posed by Asha Singh, Lady Irwin College, Delhi
- 14 **LEARNING TO LIVE**  
S. Anandalakshmy, Consultant in child development and education, Chennai
- 18 **CHILD CARE IN INDIAN TRADITION**  
Anuradha Singh, National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies (NISTADS), Delhi
- 24 **ON BEING A PARENT**  
Meenakshi Gautam, India Programme Manager, International Training in Health, Delhi
- 26 **STARTING AFRESH**  
Roopa Shanker, educational entrepreneur, Allahabad
- 29 **REACHING OUT TO CHILDREN**  
Sonya Acharya, primary school teacher, Delhi
- 32 **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**  
Ankur Madan, Lecturer, Lady Irwin College, Delhi
- 35 **EXPERIENCES FROM CHILD ART**  
Devi Prasad, sculptor and educationist, Delhi
- 38 **RESTORING PLAY**  
Sudershan Khanna, National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad
- 41 **HUNGER**  
Veena Das, Professor of Sociology, University of Delhi
- 45 **LISTENING TO CHILDREN**  
Priti Joshi, Lady Irwin College, Delhi
- 48 **THE POLITICS OF CHILD CARE**  
Vandana Prasad, Consulting Pediatrician and activist, Delhi
- 55 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by Vasudha Dhagamwar, Sujata Sriram, Ananya Dasgupta, Reenee Singh and Shobhana Bhattacharji
- 64 **RESEARCH**  
Extracts from a report, 'Meeting the Needs of the Child in India'
- 68 **INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT**  
Some facilities and programmes for children
- 71 **FURTHER READING**  
A select and relevant bibliography compiled by Asha Singh and Nidhi Ahuja
- 74 **COMMUNICATION**  
Received from Primila Lewis, Delhi
- 77 **COMMENT**  
Received from Purushottam Agrawal, Delhi
- 80 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdhury

# The problem

THERE is no one picture of the young Indian child. The multiple life forms are real and specially so for Indian children. A one and a half year old, perched on a yet to fully mature hip bone of a seven year old, experiences the world meandering through heavy traffic, digesting the impermanence of images as cars whiz by. In another setting a toddler routinely wakes up in the arms of the mother sipping milk from a silver spoon, is massaged by the grandmother chanting rhymes and is indulged with a variety of food items. Both survive living their own reality.

Yet, the spontaneity of childhood is undeniable, regardless of social deprivation or abundance. A scarcely clad three year old child on the street put forward his second hand when given *prasād*, saying, 'I want some for my brother.' So did a four year old, demanding a 'return gift' for his uninvited older brother at a birthday party, adding, 'My brother had to stay home because mother says he is not invited.'

For understanding childhood it is important to demystify the glory of any one class, caste, region, gender or time. What needs to be highlighted is the growth and coexistence of children in several contexts.

Childhood is the first exciting wave in the sea of life. Poetic verses or definitions of childhood are unable to fully capture the dynamics and dynamism of children's expressions. Their awe and curiosity, their searching looks, the major connections that 'children's minds' can retain and reproduce, leave us adults perplexed, looking for doors and windows to unravel the complexities of their 'developing minds'.

How do we understand our young ones? Childhood is a state of being untouched by interfering social influences. The simplicity, forthrightness and playfulness of childhood is omnipresent and irrepressible. Recognition that spontaneity and exuberance is natural to children has to be a basic belief when discussing the reality of children. Orientation to children or being child-friendly does not diffuse issues of concern that need adult attention.

A little girl in a *sari* or a male child in a *dhoti* may appeal to adults, an image akin to Victorian children in heavy frilled garments. Yet they are small people in adult robes. The concept that children are miniature adults is 'researched falsehood' which needs to be

negated. This devaluation of the old dictum is necessary for a positive approach to children in tune with their specific cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional processes. Schools must begin to question why they screen three year olds for admission when the children are tense with anxiety at being separated from parents, as also having to perform before strangers. Both society and family need to review the rituals they create. 'Children are not mere extensions in the branches of the family tree but daughters and sons of life's yearning for continuity.'

It is sheer joy to see each infant create her own world. Every society indulges its young as can be seen in the games, rhymes and stories about children in all cultures. That infancy is a significant part of life for all human beings has been known intuitively and empirically through time. Exploring the repertoire of regional and linguistic heritage for socializing our young is necessary. Child care should be ecologically and culturally rooted – this is essential knowledge young parents should be familiar with.

Our society is stratified and divided with unequal opportunities. The fact that experience of childhood for growth and development is inequable is a truth that disturbs those of us with concern for our young. This inequality, though a part of the natural social structure, tampers with the human resource and the completeness of the circle of life.

Deprivation creates diverse and deep-rooted influences. Poverty can be devastating but it may not be singularly responsible for limiting children's growth. A lack of abundance, absence of ready-made play materials often catalyses innovation and invention. This creative spirit is present in children's play and organizers of children's programmes often cater to this specific proneness for exploration and adventure.

The culture of childhood has an oral code of transmission. Games, secret languages, jingles – a variety of interaction patterns pass from one generation to the next. Play and fun are children's major work. Most learning about social conduct, adjustment, assertion and self-protection are learnt in playfields. For children, toys are not just recreational objects but playmates with whom they relate in special ways.



Children seek children, yet adult protection is a necessity, willingly or grudgingly. This bond needs to be protected and treasured. We also need to assess the experiences we provide our progeny. Blaming the entry of television into our homes is no remedy for the unmonitored viewing we often permit our children.

Children learn by being in stimulating environments. One of the crucial ways in which a culture aids the intellectual growth of the child is through special dialogues between family and friends. The family setting is essential to nurturing and support. No care system can be a substitute for the multiple bonding provided by family ties. Perhaps sustaining the family structure may be a way to conserve the enriching influence of multiple one-to-one bonding.

Social institutions establish a routine, a daily schedule for the young. Children do not rebel against structure or rhythms, what they oppose are rigid and inflexible roles and rules. It is not school or homework they resent. Rather, they are frustrated by learning about their environment in dark, dingy rooms, cramming numbers from 1 to 100 and 100 to 1, in having to learn S for shoe, not *juta*, without knowing the relation of shoe to *juta*. We have been successful in declaring that learning centres exist within a kilometre of settlements (National Policy of Education, 1986). The dream of our young children prancing to a neighbourhood learning centre was justified, yet we have been unable to create temples of learning or sustain our *guru shishya parampara*. Our children go to school with heavy bags and heavy hearts. School playfields, corridors and free time brings out the exuberance of children.

Our schools are trying to cope with large numbers, a reality that needs to be accepted and dealt with, specially by teacher training units. Whether in a rural school, an experimental learning centre, or a government school, children thrive best when their identity is established. Both parents and teachers need to understand and acknowledge each child's varying cognitive and linguistic pace, along with their social and emotional space. Schools need to build home-school relations in new ways.

As parents we need to be aware of our children's experiences in school. With both spouses at work,

alternative child care perhaps needs professional attention and recognition. Child care is not guardianship or physical safety or feeding children as per schedule. For those who are caregivers, the primary message should be that it is important to save children from hunger and getting hurt. Equally significant is to know what new things the child is touching, the feelings and thoughts that are being expressed. Children seek exploration, excitement and adventure. The repetitive throwing of a spoon, the gurgling of sounds, the gazing at different objects are forms of communication. We as a society need to reflect on the joys of being children, rather than hurry them into becoming 'all grown up with nowhere to go.'

This issue of *Seminar* attempts to sensitize adults to their own childhood. A connectedness to childhood helps overcome limitations as also build on nostalgic memories such as 'We as children had people tell us stories' or 'We as children never talked back.' Human interactions are experiential; the past leads to the present and living the present in its fullness leads to a bright future. It is the understanding, enhancing and enriching of childhood experiences that we wish to address. As adults let us relearn

To listen to the birds,  
to run behind the butterfly,  
to watch the rainbow,  
to push the pebble.

Let us work on computers,  
yet remember the countless anecdotes,  
of our doting grandmothers,  
the countless leaves that rustle in the fields.

Let us aim to fly in the vastness of the sky  
explore the never ending fields,  
enjoy a tractor ride,  
not just be lost in the traffic tide.

The sea, the mountains, the desert beckon us.  
Let's learn to explore, discover and sustain  
our potential to be human and humane.

ASHA SINGH

# Learning to live

S ANANDAKASHMY

I SPENT a great deal of time ruminating when asked to write a paper on childhood in the Indian family and society for *Seminar*. What a vast universe of cultural factors to sample given the varied subcultures that constitute Indian society! It is not possible to write about the majority culture which, in the first instance, is difficult to define. While the concept of majority is clear, given a finite number of events or people, its application to cultures is difficult as cultures and subcultures have blurred boundaries.

Our pluralistic society has some continuities across time and regions, as well as discontinuities which are ecological or related to socio economic status. Where does a subculture begin and where does it end? When is an aspect of culture Indian and when is it borrowed? When is a custom seen as having originated outside India and what is the critical period for it to be considered Indian? There are no rules which can be consulted to answer these questions, so most social scientists are left to pick their own heuristic device.

Popular writing about children tends to think of children in two categories: rich and poor. It is commonly assumed that rich children have everything that money can buy: status, good schooling and opportunities for achievement, while the poor have inadequate nutrition, a few years of unsatisfactory schooling and a future which imprisons them in the downward spiral of disadvantage. While they do reflect a reality, these categories represent two ends of the curve, forgetting that there is a large middle section. There are no catchy epithets to identify children in the middle which spans a wide range on the affluence-poverty continuum. It is only an occasional ethnography that illumines this relatively unresearched section of Indian childhood.

It is in this context that I turned to the leaves of a two decade old field diary to present some aspects of childhood that tell us a great deal about society. The families were from a group called Chippa Namdev Vamshi who live in a fairly dense cluster in Sanganer, on the outskirts of Jaipur.

Their lives may help us understand what is Indian about childhood in India.

Traditionally, research on child-rearing has focused on the biological phases and the modes of coping with their mastery. Belief systems and ritual practices also influence parental socialization practices, and 'culture' is an important explanatory variable. But ecological factors like the nature of occupation and the relationship of human resources to other types of resources have generally been relegated to the background in published research.

**T**his study shifts focus from the management of the child's primary needs to the socialization of children for occupational roles. The methods used by parents and significant others in the fostering of responsibility, self-reliance and achievement in children between the ages of 6 and 16, are central to this approach. These variables have relevance for role performance in the years of adulthood.

The observations included the specific tasks allotted to children, the effectiveness of task performance, the degree of competence and the mode of learning a new task. Parents were interviewed at a pace and style suitable for them, often in small groups rather than individually, on the following aspects: their attitudes towards their own occupations and the extent to which these influenced their socialization practices; aspirations for their children; their perception of the link between present tasks and future roles for the children; and the pattern of reinforcements they used.

The study was of a traditional craft community engaged in hand-block printing. The respondents belonged to the caste of weavers who, according to their oral history, became textile printers in the 11th century. The community comprised of

200 families, most of them kinsfolk. Their printed fabrics had in the last decade received a big boom, and within a generation some of the families had moved from subsistence levels of living to a reasonable standard. Those among them with the means to invest in the flourishing trade had done extremely well for themselves, and three families had become affluent.

The child's gender was the most important factor in allocating domestic, craft-related and school-related duties. By the age of 10, girls were working at home, busy with tasks like sweeping, fetching water, washing clothes, or taking care of their younger siblings; some were at school, and almost all of them were helping with the craft in some way. One hardly saw a girl over the age of 10 who was idle. Obedience, not responsibility, was the essential attribute for children from the point of view of the parents. It appeared that in situations with little scope to demonstrate efficacy at school or in the outside world, a number of children took some pride in their craft work. Having something tangible to show for their efforts was an incentive in itself.

**T**here was no strict time schedule for the work. The lack of scheduling was not haphazard, but related to the availability of raw materials or the marketing of the product. They preferred an 'organic' approach rather than a 'mechanical' one in scheduling their work, and though low on economic status were high on autonomy.

Individualism as known in the West was not a prevailing value and yet it was believed that each child was born with his own fate, abilities and endowments. Parents felt that they could not have specific expectations of their children and were not in favour of moulding the child to fit a model. A child's abilities were considered to

emerge with his maturation. Maturation was seen as a leisurely process, different for each child, and one which did not admit acceleration. Childhood, it was agreed, was a time for play, fun and laughter; but when the family's survival needs had to be met, even children had to work.

**I**n the case of very young children, those under eight years of age, parental tolerance for transgressions and regressions was high, and yet, the average 12 year old in these communities demonstrated self-reliance and carried quite a heavy work-load. The finding that in many traditional cultures the child becomes occupationally a fully functioning adult around age 15, was also supported by this study.

The cloth printers of Sanganer came close to the ideal-type of a traditional way of life. Kinship and caste ties were highly valued and traditional rituals practised and preserved with great pride. They lived in two *mohallas* and most of the social interactions were among themselves. Sanganer in the 1970s was a town with a population of 11000, with five primary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. But effectively they had little interaction with the rest of the town. In a way, their world corresponded to the description of the traditional world as a 'small one in which the dramatis personae could be well known to each of the players.' The compass of daily life was finite and familiar in the limited sphere within his purview. Any person could learn about his effectiveness honestly and with less ambiguity than is characteristic of a complex modern society, since the feed-back was direct and the criteria were intrinsic.

Most children were not used to being confronted with questions about their future; children under 11 years

of age would either giggle, run away, or remain silent. Of the children between 11 and 16, only half of them answered the question. Of these, 75% of the boys mentioned high school education as their goal and the rest thought that a college education would be feasible. Most boys seemed to appreciate the advantages of a salaried job, but many of them wanted to practise their craft, at least on a part-time basis.

**T**he children attained a considerable mastery of the craft between the ages of 13 and 15. Imitation was the dominant mode of learning new skills. One of the articulate parents we interviewed said: 'From the time the child is born, he is surrounded by the craft. He can pick some blocks and try them out, imitating those around him. If he develops an interest, he can become one of us. If he does not show interest in the job, what use would our forcing be? If he does not like the craft he will not be a good craftsman.' This view summed up the essence of their approach to the socialization of their children, vis-a-vis pursuing the traditional occupation.

There is a parallel to this in the approach of some 'primitive peoples' with regard to the transmission of skills. In an article, Margaret Mead wrote about the educational emphasis of the West in primitive perspectives. She discussed how adults in primitive societies taught their children all they knew. In her words: 'Miscarriages in the smooth working of the transmission of the available skills and knowledge did occur, but they were not sufficient to focus the attention of the group upon the desirability of teaching as over against the desirability of learning' (Mead, 1942, p. 634).

In Sanganer, children between the ages of 6 and 9 learnt to take care of themselves. But it was clear from the way the mothers answered the

question, that in their thinking there was no specific norm with regard to the age of self-reliant behaviour. When asked if the child took care of his own things, there was a surprised look on their faces. There were few things a child owned, they said. His school books were his own, generally, and may be some clothes. But often even the clothes were jointly owned by children in the family, and the child wore whatever was clean and available. Bathing involved group participation, with all the cousins of the same-sex from the household getting together at the roadside water-tap. The children did not possess toys or other objects that they could call their own. They improvised games with empty dye-containers or printing blocks that were not in use, or with sticks and stones; but they grew up without any personal possessions.

**A**s for discipline, punishment was mild, generally scolding rather than anything physical, while reward for good behaviour was rare. Praising a child for doing something expected of him was not customary. Material rewards were also seldom given. There was a belief that praising children spoilt them and made them disobedient. The tasks of children, even of those who did work regularly, were not given verbal recognition.

Another reason for lack of praise lay in the organic way in which the family was perceived. The child is such an integral part of the family that praising him is like patting oneself on the back. Also, open admiration, especially of a child, could lead to the casting of the evil eye (even without evil intentions or envious feelings, the evil eye could be cast). In any case, the belief that exulting over one's good fortune or one's child's smartness carries a risk, was widely accepted within the culture.

The linear relationship between early socialization and later manifestation of competence was not obvious. Children who were careless about cleanliness turned into well-groomed youngsters around age 12; those who appeared unconcerned about future orientations at age 10 became responsible enough by age 14 to share the burden of providing for the family. No direct and simple relationship could be traced between the parents' efforts to socialise the child and the child's competence behaviour.

**T**he intervening variable may have been simply the function of growing up. The tremendous weight which we place on early experiences in childhood, especially in cognitive stimulation, may not be entirely justified. Even orthodox psychologists like Kagan and Klein (1973, p. 957) have cited data in a monograph that indicates that absolute retardation at the time of the emergence of universal cognitive competencies during infancy is not predictive of comparable deficits in memory, perceptual analysis, and inference during pre-adolescence. This finding is contrary to orthodox child development theories – and has tended to be ignored or be damned with faint praise.

It was not only the efforts of parents and other socialisers, but incidental factors, situational events, and specific life experiences that were found to be salient. For instance among the printers of Sanganer, a boy of 15, who showed a high degree of competence in all his activities, was found to be the sole supporter of his mother and the younger children after his father died. He performed well in school, stayed back at recess time to complete his assignments, and when he came home, got down to the printing with alacrity and vigour, making enough for the family's survival. In any

case, there were individual differences in parents and children that constantly acted as a brake against easy over-generalisation about the environment.

**L**ife in an extended family, it has been widely observed, calls for the development of traits different from those that are adaptive to life in a nuclear family. In an extended family, there appears to be high value for non-aggression, obedience, conformity and co-operation, as opposed to an emphasis on independence, individuality, achievement, and assertiveness, which find an implicit value in a nuclear household. When a group of people share resources, and are bound by ties of kinship and common traditions, the resulting system may be called familism – i.e., within the family, to each what he needs and from each what he can give.

Living in close proximity with kin of all ages also necessitates everyone being aware of the motivational states of the others in the family. Where consensus and compliance are necessary for the maintenance of family solidarity and integrity of kin and caste, a high degree of individualism may be dysfunctional. Both men and women would have to develop dependence, especially in the interpersonal field.

Given their occupation, the Sanganer families were above the threshold. There may have been physical deprivation and other limitations, but the craft itself made possible a feedback that acted as a reinforcement for the people. The satisfaction of making something gave them a sense of effectivity unachievable for others at the same level of living without this mode of expression. *Svadharama* (natural inclination) did lend some meaning to their lives and this core of subjective meaningfulness made life more liveable. The printers

in Sanganer had prospered with an increase in demand for their products. Correspondingly, there were better prospects of success for their children. The competence of the group was thus also a function of economics.

Finally, the issues I had raised in an earlier paper, 'How independent is the independent variable?' (1972) have received support here. In that article I had pointed out that caste and religion seemed to have pride of place in the independent variables selected for research in India and that they have often been treated as explanatory variables for a variety of behaviours that could not have been theoretically related to them. Had we argued that position in the caste hierarchy would predict competence socialization, we would have found no clear pattern emerging. The viability and prosperity of the craft was a better predictor of competence in parents' socialization and children's performance than either caste or religion.

**I**n Sanganer, where the craft had prospered, the youth made better use of public institutions like schools or colleges. Ecological factors like the amount of space, proximity to water, nearness of school, as well as craft related factors like availability of raw materials, space for storage, and facilities for working seemed important. Those who perceived the social structure as offering the possibility of a good life were more future oriented, and their perceptions were often very realistic.

While discussing the results in an attempt to identify the patterns that emerged from it, a member of our group felt that our definition of competence was perhaps ethnocentric (middle class). The people themselves may consider that being a good group member and getting on with others had greater value. In viewing

competence purely in terms of the individual, we had emphasised one modality of functioning. The other side of it would be group or community related.

**T**o include both the aspects of the individual and society, the core concept of competence may need to be divided into: individual competence, made up of achievement, self reliance, and responsibility; and inter personal competence, made up of the ability to cooperate with others, to be non-aggressive, and to work towards group goals.

To conclude:

1. Learning was more by imitation than by instruction. Therefore, learning became more important than teaching. Furthermore, the focus was on doing, more than on learning. Ecological factors determined what was done, how and by whom.
2. Since the roles to be adopted by the children were clear-cut and well-defined, competence in performance *per se* was not emphasised. Self reliance was expected to develop with maturation; achievement was underplayed, except occasionally. Responsibility was generally less valued than obedience. Nevertheless, in craft families, the children had developed a high level of craft competence and general competence by age 15.
3. There were almost no rules for very young children, who enjoyed freedom within their situational framework. But childhood ended rather soon and the boundary lines between childhood, adolescence and adulthood were blurred.
4. Gender roles were clearly differentiated and influenced socialization from birth. In a society with limited alternatives, the girls and women found that they had fewer choices than the male in every sphere of life. Young

girls had no control whatsoever over events that governed their life; it was only age and marital status that would confer the right to some authority over decisions in later life.

5. Family, kinsfolk, and caste were the major groups of identification for the child.

6. Families who were economically marginal and on a subsistence level showed less concern for competence. They had little confidence in the system and a realistic appraisal of their own control over their future or the future of their children. Families which were above the survival threshold made better use of social institutions in the larger system.

7. Child work in a family occupation is totally different from child labour. Prior to the Industrial Revolution in Europe, families included children in their occupational activity. When a child learnt the tasks to be done, it was seen as an apprenticeship. Traditional crafts families in India have the same perceptions as pre-industrial people. Theoretically, the following comments appear relevant:

a) In traditional, face-to-face communities inter-personal competence, or the ability to get on with the family and community without open aggression may be as highly valued as personal competence.

b) Ecological variables are clearly important as predictors of competent behaviour.

c) Not only is competence an individual's trait, it is also a trait of environments and of communities.

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# Child care in Indian tradition

ANURADHA SINGH

'WHATEVER else a culture does or does not do, if it wishes to reproduce itself, it must produce new members. Because cultural reproduction depends upon human reproduction, questions of childbearing are invariably significant in the life of a culture, and significant changes in childbearing patterns often signal broad cultural change.'

Over the years broad cultural changes have occurred in mother and child health care practices in India. With the advent of modern medicine, and the consequent marginalisation of indigenous medical systems, traditional practices have fallen into disarray. India today is a curious mix of tradition and modernity, with an established continuity of its tradition along with change and innovations that are restructuring the contemporary social milieu.

Child care practices reflect this larger arena as well and inhere contradictions of our peculiar tradition-modernity nexus. Being part of a changing family structure and community, the child cannot be viewed in isolation. Caught between modern institutionalised medicine and people's knowledge of traditional practices inherited from the past, she surely does not deserve the confusion on child bearing and child rearing issues that reigns in contemporary times. Ill-cared and malnourished,<sup>2</sup> our children demand that we re-examine tradi-

1. Paula A. Treichler, 'Feminism, Medicine, and a Meaning of Child Birth', in Jacobus Mary et al. (eds.), *Body Politics, Women and the Discourse of Science*. Routledge, N.Y., 1990, p. 113.

2. India ranks next only to Bangladesh among all the countries in the world in child mal-

tional practices of mother-child care, and the associated rituals with understanding and empathy.

Underneath the rich and vivid cultural diversity that characterised our traditional society, there was, by and large, a uniform practice of child care, though the various regions left their own distinct cultural marks on such practices. Even with the advent of westernisation and modernisation of health delivery systems, these age-old practices are widely prevalent and continue to be relied upon.<sup>3</sup> These practices relate to the care of the pregnant mother, her post delivery care, care of the neonate, practices of giving prelacteal feed, initiation of breast feeding, and the rites and rituals related to the child during her growing years.<sup>4</sup> For understanding these practices and their basic structure, one has to look into Ayurveda. It provides the foundation of these practices, even of cultural and regional diversity in these practices.

**W**hat is currently termed 'mother and child health care' is part of a branch of Ayurveda called Kaumara Bhryta incorporating both obstetrics and paediatrics. Child care in Indian tradition, as reported in both classical Indian texts and folk practices found in various communities and regions, begins earlier than even conception itself. Susruta Samhita, a classical text

nutrition. It is a matter of concern that as many as 53% of children in India suffer from malnutrition according to UNICEF statistics. *The Progress of Nations 1996*, UNICEF, N.Y., pp. 18-19.

3. An all India multi-state survey on local beliefs and practices concerning health of women and children bears this out. Reported in Smita Bajpai, *Her Healing Heritage*. CHETNA, Ahmedabad, 1996.

4. A popular and authoritative introduction to these practices is given in M. Radhika and A.V. Balasubrahmanian, *Mother and Child Care in Traditional Medicine*, part 1 and 2. LSPSS, Madras, 1990.

of Ayurveda, explains how coordination of the four factors – 'menstrual period (ritu), healthy womb (ksetra), nutrient fluid (i.e., chyle of the digested food, ambu), healthy semen (bija) – along with the proper observance of the attendant rules is necessary for the conception and development of a healthy child.

'Just as the proper season (ritu), good soil (ksetra), water (nutrient fluid, ambu) and vigorous seeds (bija) together with proper care help the germination of strong and un-diseased sprouts, a child who is the fruit of such conception is destined to be beautiful, of good health, generous, long lived, virtuous, attached to the parents and capable of discharging her parental obligations.'<sup>5</sup>

**O**nce conception takes place the mother and the embryo requires a specific kind of food and nutrition. Normal growth of the child and her health, and the woman's body are of paramount importance at this juncture. Ayurveda texts provide a unique set of recommendations regarding food and conduct (ahara-vihara) for the pregnant mother. From the very first month, the pregnant woman is advised to take certain food products and avoid others, and the regime goes on to the ninth month. The diet prescribed during pregnancy takes into account the month-wise development of the foetus, as the food substances prescribed have nutritive qualities required for the organ development of the child. This nine monthly regimen not only nourishes the child, but also gives strength to the mother's body and takes care of problems commonly associated with pregnancy.

5. Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter II, verse 33. *Susruta Samhita*, edited and translated into English by Kaviraj Kunjalal Bhishagratna, Chowkhamba Press, Varanasi, 1981.

The mother-child's preventive and promotive nutrition regime addresses problems such as nausea, water retention, swelling, blurred vision, constipation, diarrhoea, fever, burning sensation, pain in the abdomen and various other aches and pains. Thus to have a healthy progeny, to withstand the strain of childbirth and postpartum phase, the pregnant woman has been asked by the Ayurvedic acaryas to follow a systematic month-wise dietary regimen and prescriptions.<sup>6</sup>

**T**here are no parallel month-wise dietary practices provided in the modern medical tradition. The prescribed dietary regimen is followed across the country with, of course, habitual, regional and cultural variations. Though food substances and their preparation differ greatly across the country, the 'qualities' of food substances follow the rationale behind dietary regimen prescribed in Ayurveda. These prescriptions are widely practised by womenfolk in our society.

Without going into the vast area of management of childbirth and postpartum care of the mother, we come to the event of childbirth and the care of the new born (navjata paricarya). Childbirth is not seen as a medical event or a pathological phenomenon which requires professional intervention. It is seen as a celebration of motherhood and childbirth. As it is both a biological and a social event, it calls for a special handling of the mother and the new born by the family, as well

6. Caraka Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter IV, verses 9-24; Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter III, verses 18-30, and; Astanga Hrdaya, section sarira sthana, chapter I, verses 37-63. *Caraka Samhita*, edited and translated into English by P.V. Sharma, Chowkhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, 1981. *Astanga Hrdaya*, edited and translated into English by K.R. Srikantha Murty, Krishandas Academy, Varanasi, 1995.

as by the community. The traditional practices of neonate care cover preventive, promotive and curative practices. The moment the placenta is separated from the uterus, certain birth rituals are performed which in their entirety are called jatakarmas (rites after birth).

**T**he child, immediately after its birth, should be cleaned of the greasy matter on the skin (vernix caseosa) using rock salt (saindhava) and ghee (sarpisa). To relieve the fatigue of birth, it should be anointed with bala taila (sida cordifolia). For resuscitation sound should be made by striking the stones near the ears and hot/cold water should be splashed on the face. Palate, throat, tongue should be cleaned with rock salt and ghee in a small quantity to help the child vomit out the swallowed amniotic fluid and clear the air passage.<sup>7</sup>

The practice of inducing vomit in the new-born child is fairly unique. The anterior fontanelle of the child should be covered with cotton soaked with bala taila. After the child has become calm and comfortable, the umbilical cord should be tied with a thread at the level of four fingers above the navel and cut with a sharp knife. The instrument should be purified in fire. The umbilical stump should be anointed with kushta taila (saussurea lappa) and haldi (turmeric) for quick healing. Haldi of course has now been recognised by modern medicine for its antiseptic and anti-inflammatory qualities. Ayurveda does not mention binding of the stump. The child is treated like an injured and traumatised person and the wound is dressed accordingly.

To provide nourishment on the first day, all the primary-texts of

Ayurveda recommend giving pre-lacteal feed to the child before it is put to the breast.<sup>8</sup> It is said that, after cleaning the infant any one of the following prescribed food combinations can be given to the child. Some of the combinations suggested for licking by new-born child are honey and ghee (mixed in unequal quantity); honey, ghee, vacha (acorus calamus) and gold (rubbed in the linctus); brahmi (moneria bacopa), sankha pusapi (canscora deussata) gold (few rubs), ghee and honey; ghee, honey and the powder of amalaki; and haritaki, ghee and honey. The first feed is supposed to impart strength, improve the digestive power, memory and intellect, promote the growth and ensure a long life span by increasing immunity against disease.

**T**he practice of pre-lacteal feed, that is licking of specially prepared paste, is fairly universal in our traditions. Pre-lacteal feed has no status in modern medicine and hence is discouraged by westernised medical practitioners, as they fear that it may choke the child or is unhygienic or that it may delay the sucking response/instinct of the child. On the contrary, the vaidya community staunchly supports this practice. Vaidyas maintain that licking the prescribed paste enhances general immunity (pratirodhaka samata) of the child. The child is put on this nourishment for the first or second day, only after which mother's milk is given.

However, mother's milk is recognised as the best feed for the

child. But when is the child to be put to the breast? Different versions are found in traditional medical texts. Caraka Samhita advises breast milk on the very first day,<sup>9</sup> whereas Susruta Samhita and Astanga Hrdaya suggest breast-feed to be given on the third day.<sup>10</sup> However, all the acaryas agree that first few drops of the mother's milk should be discarded for purifying the tubules. This is a widely accepted practice in almost all traditional communities.

**A** study covering 53 societies and cultures recorded widespread practice of discarding colostrum and delaying breast-feed for two to three days.<sup>11</sup> Views prevalent within traditional communities, as also supported by the vaidyas, favours an initial discarding of the colostrum. It is advised in Ayurveda that colostrum be discarded by the gentle squeezing of the substance which is thick, pale and viscous from the breast since the child may find it hard to digest and it could lead to vomiting, indigestion, fever and so on in the neonate.<sup>12</sup>

The Ayurvedic rationale and debate on discarding piyusa or colostrum<sup>13</sup> needs to be examined with interest by modern medical researchers. Modern medical establishment rejects this practice as unscientific at face value, since it believes that colostrum contains antibodies beneficial

9. Caraka Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter VIII, verse 46.

10. Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter x, verse 13, and; Astanga Hrdaya, section uttara sthana, chapter I, verses 12-15.

11. A. Niehoff and N. Meister, 'The Cultural Practice of Breast-Feeding: A Survey', *Environmental Child Health*, (18), 1972, pp. 16-20.

12. Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter x, verse 24; Harita Samhita, section prathama sthana, verses 11-12.

13. Special issue on colostrum, 'piyusa visesanka', *Madhu Jivan*, April 1989, Madhvi Prakashana, Bombay.

8. Caraka Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter VIII, verse 46; Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter x, verse 10; *Kasyapa Samhita*, section sutra sthana chapter leha adhyaya, and; Astanga Hrdaya, section uttara sthana, chapter I, verses 7-10. *Kasyapa Samhita*, edited and translated into Hindi by Ayurvedalankara Satyapal Bhishagacarya, Chowkhamba Sanskrita Samsthana, Varanasi, 1994.

7. Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter x, verse 16; Astanga Hrdaya, section uttara sthana, chapter I, verses 1-3.



for immune system of the child. In contradistinction to the prevailing practices and Ayurvedic rationale, modern medicine strongly advises feeding the child with colostrum.

**I**t is advised that while feeding the child the mother should have a happy disposition, that she should avoid negative emotions like anger, fear and grief. She should be rested. Hunger, sexual excitement and physical fatigue lead to depletion of breast milk and hence should be avoided.<sup>14</sup>

If it is suspected that the mother does not have adequate milk and the child is not satisfied, various galactagogue medicines like kheer of poppy seeds, various decoctions of ajmoda (*apium graveolens*), satavari (*asparagus racemosus*), methi (*fenugrreek*), meat, ghee and milk should be given to the mother. Alternatively, if the mother is sick or unable to feed at all, the provision of a wet nurse (*dhatri*) for the child is suggested. Other substitutes are goat or cow milk. To make it like breast milk, cow's milk should be boiled with *laghu pancamula* (roots of five trees) and sugar added.

The postnatal traditional practice of isolating mother and the child from the household helps them to recuperate from the birthing phenomenon. Not only does it prevent exposure to any kind of malady, it provides for a psychological binding of the mother and child. The early recognition of the mother takes place through contact – fondling, hugging, cooing, and singing lullabies. It contributes to establishing a warm, stimulating and secure relationship between the two. This constrained practice, for purificatory rites of mother and child, is not recognised by modern sensibilities. Popular modern medical

approach only recommends the isolation of a pre-mature child from the mother.

Similarly, giving an oil massage to the child<sup>15</sup> before bath remains a widespread traditional practice. Massage, an extension of touch, is considered beneficial for imparting strength to the body of the child as it stimulates the circulatory system, improves muscle tone, kindles digestive power, improves skin complexion and provides a soothing effect to the nervous system. A few drops of oil are to be put in the ear and nose and applied on navel, orifice and head. The choice of oil depends on the region, the season and the constitution (*prakriti*) of the child.

**A**fter the massage, a warm water bath is preferred, but for the head normal water is recommended. Warm water is medicated with *nirgundi* (*vitex negundo*) and other herbs. Tulsi leaves are considered good during the rainy season. Giving bath with warm decoction of triphala (*amla*, *harada* and *baheda*) is also considered good for raising the immunity level of the child. Before the first bath the child needs to be anointed with *balā ashwaganddhā* oil. The decoction used for bath is hot or lukewarm according to the season and is treated with *ficus* group of drugs. Also mentioned is gold or silver treated water for the bath. The child is then wrapped in silken soft clothes.<sup>16</sup>

Along with the prenatal and postnatal health care practices, certain other traditional practices are mentioned in medical texts, as well as reportedly practised universally by the communities in one form or another. These are the rites and rituals

(*samskaras*) of childhood. On the sixth day of childbirth, a ceremony called *sastipuja* is performed. It is also known as *paksa sasthi* and *sutika sasthi*. It calls for performing protective rites. It is an application of five purificatory rites, which are measures for child's survival and well-being.<sup>17</sup> This ceremony is widely performed in the northern and western parts of India.

**T**he *sutika uthana* ceremony is performed on the tenth day of birth according to the customs of the family. *Sutaka* period indicates birth-related observance in the family as *pataka* period stands for death-related observance in which no auspicious activity is undertaken. *Sutika uthana* is a purification rite and denotes the end of the *sutaka* period when the taboo of not performing any other auspicious activity is lifted.

*Niskarmana samskara* follows the 12th or 13th day of birth, when the mother and child are shown the sun and are declared free to participate in family life. This is considered a milestone in the child's coming into the world. This ceremony is also known as *suraja puja* or *aditya darsana* and is widely practised by various communities across the country.<sup>18</sup>

*Namkarana samskara* (naming ceremony) is performed on the 12th day. Ayurvedic *acāryas* suggest that the child should be given a name related to the gods or the stars, or of relatives and with an even number of letters.<sup>19</sup>

17. *Astanga Hrdaya*, section *uttara sthana*, chapter 1, verse 21; *Kasyapa Samhita*, section on *balagraha*, verses 9-13. *Astanga Hrdaya* does not mention it as *sasthi* but has prescribed specific protective rites on sixth night after birth.

18. *Paraskara Grahastotra* I.17.5.6 and *Manu Smṛiti* II.134.

19. *Astanga Hrdaya*, section *uttara sthana*, chapter 1, verses 22-23.

14. *Astanga Hrdaya*, section *uttara sthana*, chapter 1, verses 17-19.

15. *Caraka Samhita*, section *sutra sthana*, chapter 5, verses 77-88.

16. *Astanga Hrdaya*, section *uttara sthana*, chapter 1, verses 5-7.

Anna prasana samskara, the first feeding of cereals or weaning away from the mother's milk, marks another significant stage in the child's life. After the sixth month, light, easily digestible food which imparts strength to the body, is to be given to the child.<sup>20</sup> The ritual is practised universally. The eldest member of the extended family usually feeds the child. This marks another milestone for the child whose sensory horizon of taste and smell are widened to incorporate what macrocosm has to offer to microcosm, i.e., her body.

**K**arnabhedan samskara (puncturing the ear lobe) is done during the sixth, seventh or eighth month. This ceremony is performed by a physician. Susruta says, the ears of a child should be bored for protection from diseases and for decoration.<sup>21</sup> He indirectly indicates that boring of the ears is prescribed for preventing hydrocele and hernia.<sup>22</sup> As a precautionary measure this samskara is done on both boys and girls.

Chudakarana samskara (tonsure ceremony) is performed at the end of the first year or before the end of the third year. The child's hair is tonsured and this samskara marks a final separation of a child from the womb. Further, the original hair of the child, that is hair from the womb, is gathered with great care and secretly thrown into the river so that no harm comes to the child.

From birth to death, through the entire life span of human being, 16 samskaras are popularly recognised though different enumerations are

found in various books.<sup>23</sup> These samskaras range from garbhadharana samskara (conception by womb) to vidyarambha samskara (beginning of the formal learning) and end with antyesti samskara (funeral ceremonies). These rites and rituals practised by various traditional communities with reasonable variations owing to regional and ideological diversity are an integral part of the socio-cultural fabric of Indian civilization. Each samskara prepares the child for qualitative shifts in life, they mark closure of old responsibilities and prepare him for new responsibilities in the journey of life. They also indicate shifts in health care regimen.

**T**hese samskaras are widely practised across regional and ideological boundaries and demonstrate the variety and diversity of practice that we see in our traditional society. Practices associated with these samskaras are foundationally justified by Ayurveda. Modern medicine and modern lifestyle has, however, made a dent on practices associated with these samskaras by either reformist prescriptions or by trivialising samskaras altogether.

The trivialising of these samskaras has occurred because of ritualistic ossification from our past as also because of condemnation by imitative westernisation. Particularly within the relatively well-off modernised strata, the conflict between Ayurveda or grandmother remedies/recipes on the one hand and modern medicine

on the other, has created a sense of confusion, bewilderment and adhocism. The child has been the victim.

Indigenous child health care practices along with associated rites and rituals hardly mirror the modernist world today. Rather, they invoke a rich cultural discourse that reflects on a particular version of reality, traditional reality, and on the institutionally confused embedding of that reality in the contemporary world. A justification for this exercise is that health-disease phenomena fall paradigmatically as much in the medical realm as in the cultural domain.

Our approach departs from conventional medical anthropology which rests on the epistemic disjunction of 'belief' and 'knowledge' on the one hand and the approach of adversely counterpoising tradition to modernity on the other. These 'perspectival obstacles' need to be seriously addressed to free the subject of child care from institutional and societal paralysis.

**A**n analysis of traditional medical system as 'belief systems' and traditional practices as 'cultural traits' is reflective of the empiricist paradigm within anthropological discourse. Indeterminacy and externality of 'truth' thus becomes a casualty. This paradigm still exerts a great deal of influence on the prevalent academic view of medical anthropology as an enterprise of studying beliefs and practices related to health-illness phenomena in diverse cultures. 'Belief' here becomes a central conceptual category connoting a disposition not free of doubt, error, uncertainty or falsehood whereas 'knowledge' claims certitude and truth.

This disjunction of 'belief' and 'knowledge' is then used to mirror the disjunction of traditional medical systems and contemporary clinical

20. Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter X, verse 64; Astanga Hridaya, section, uttara sthana, chapter I, verse 37.

21. Susruta Samhita, section sarira sthana, chapter XVI, verse 1.

22. Susruta Samhita, section cikitsa sthana, chapter XIX, verses 8-12.

23. Parasara, Varaha and Baudhyana Grahastotra enumerate 13 samskaras whereas Asvalayana Grahastotra enumerates only 11; Manu Smriti also enumerate 13 samskaras; Vaikhansa Grahastotra enumerates 18, and; Gautama Dharmasutra gives altogether 40 samskaras. See Rajbali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*. Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 19-21.

medical sciences. This mirror echoes power relations rather than justify reality. Using contemporary clinical practices and biomedical knowledge as a norm for comparing the healing practices of traditional societies has led to an impasse in uncovering the 'truth' of traditional medical knowledge and practices.

**N**owhere is this more pronounced than in the area of mother and child health care practices. Existing practice today clandestinely smuggle in elements of tradition even in entirely modernised quarters, largely because of the 'underground' power of grandmother's 'truth'. 'Untrained' dais and common womenfolk keep pushing cultural 'truth' in other quarters. Modern medicine and Ayurveda are unable to conduct a dialogue in the interest of truth. The state and its health delivery system are oblivious to the issues involved.

There are millions of housewives, womenfolk and elders with traditional knowledge of home remedies and herbal cures. There are about 7 lakh traditional birth attendants, about 3 lakh herbal healers of chronic ailments, about 60,000 bonesetters and thousands of practitioners taking care of specialities like eye problems, respiratory problems, dental problems, arthritis, wounds, burns and one could add to the list. Such a resource base is more comprehensively distributed in society and somehow provides health care to people where the official primary health care system does not reach. The traditional knowledge base is decentralised, dependent on locally available natural resources and community supported. This knowledge and skill, condemned to live underground, is expected to naturally disappear with time.

The traditional health care system in India manifests at two lev-

els – institutionally traditional, and institutionally modernised and official. The institutionally traditional level of suddha ayurveda bases its practice on the codified, formalised knowledge found in various books and manuscripts with a strong theoretical foundation.

The second level of modern Ayurveda practitioners acquire training through degree or diploma in one of the traditional medical systems like Ayurveda, Unani or Siddha. Though weak in the foundations of traditional medical systems, they are professionally qualified to set up medical practice. They operate more as extension workers of modern medicine though wearing the garb of traditional medical practitioners. They are embodiments of the current state of confusion regarding the truth of traditional and modern medicine. Local health practices or folk medicine though dispersed and region specific, is in a state of disarray because its institutional support structure has crumbled. Confusion abounds about its truth.

**W**hat we need is an honest, abiding and sustained dialogue on truth between suddha ayurveda acaryas and upright modern medicine men. Both are epistemically responsible and are not only loyal to their respective knowledges but have the capacity to empathise with lok vidya, people's knowledge and skill.

Let the 'truth' of both Ayurveda and modern medicine face each other in the interest of the child. Such a sustained dialogue is truly possible only after overcoming 'perspectival obstacles' in the interest of the people. This dialogue can pave the way for overcoming institutional dysfunctionality and confusion that reign today in our society. It should be made the basis of a campaign that promotes positive practices of child care.

# On being a parent

MEENAKSHI GAUTAM

May I join you in the doghouse, Rover?  
I wish to retire till the party's over.  
Since three o'clock I've done my best  
To entertain each tiny guest:  
I blew their bubbles, I sailed their boats,  
I kept them from each other's throats.  
I told them tales of magic lands.  
I took them out to wash their hands.  
I sorted their rubbers and tied their laces.  
I wiped their noses and dried their faces.  
My conscience now I've left behind me.  
And if they want me, let them find me.

THIS is a selection of lines from the 'Children's Party', another one of those Best of Ogden Nash's, and for all you long enduring fellow mums and dads who would like to feast your eyes on the rest, the title of the collection is: *Candy is Dandy: The Best of Ogden Nash*, published by Mandarin Humour Classics and reprinted in 1996.

But still we want children! We want that delicious babyhood that lingers on in memory long after those interminable bouts of fatigue have faded away. No longer does one remember our miserable failures as walking-talking tranquilisers – those endless treks across limited terrace spaces, rocking and cuddling the little monsters, cussed in their determination to stay awake. Gone are those sleepless, terror-stricken nights when the 'son and heir' seemed inconsolable and utterly unpredictable, disproving every single word in our collection of the world's most revered parenting guides.

The truth is, the only memories are to do with happiness – the first smile of recognition giving way to gurgling laughter, the first sounds of 'mamma' and 'appa', the first step, the

first wet and slobbery kiss... the first hesitant attempts to hold the bottle, the stubborn insistence on being the junior weightlifting champion, lifting huge spoons to fill a tiny mouth at meal time... all these and other images nullify the moments of teeth-grinding exasperation so aptly described by Nash.

I learned what parenting was all about six years ago, two years after acquiring a Masters in Child Development. For the first time I discovered the 'academics' of development converging and unfolding in real flesh and blood, my baby son's, and real sweat and tears – mine. I had the good fortune of being able to strike off a year and a half from my career graph to be a full-time mother when he came along. I also had the good fortune of belonging to a small social circle of baby boomers who, in a sense, grew up together along with the kids we bore.

This unending practicum helped me realise the meaning of much of that classroom text, which I thought I had 'licked' after flying through college with an honours degree. My first realisation, as my son grew, and, rather sinking in at first, was that children have a mind of their own! This was the sum total of all the theories of 'cognitive development' that unanimously proclaimed that 'children think differently, act differently, talk differently, behave differently; they are *not* miniature adults' – a commonly held medieval view. I noted with happiness that many of the con-

temporary parents I often exchanged notes with were far from medieval in their outlook, even though they did not possess that cutting edge of academic knowledge which I did. Nevertheless, there was a warm, positive and encouraging acceptance of the distinct character of childhood:

In summer, I am glad  
we children are so small  
For we can see a thousand things  
that men can't see at all.

They don't know much about the moss  
and all the stones they pass.  
They never lie and play among  
the forests in the grass.

They walk about a long way off  
And, when they are at sea  
Let Father stoop as best as he can  
He can't find things like me.

Of course, this caprice of childhood – charming in its unassuming transparency and boundless creativity – translates ever so often into an egotistical, selfish, tenacity: 'But I want to, naa!' It could be the book that he wants me to read to him just when I've settled down with the newspaper and a steaming mug of home-brewed coffee to pamper myself after a hard day. It could be the afternoon bicycle ride just when I'm contemplating a well-deserved afternoon nap, or the bedtime conversation that he eagerly waits for just when I start itching for my post-dinner walk. It could be the friend he wants to visit at 10 pm 'just because I want to be with him.' In short, 'But I want to, naa!'

A strong mind, however, is also open to strong logic. When whims are understood in their right perspective, for the needs that they express, and given in to whenever appropriate, children do open up to the powers of reasoning even when at their most unreasonable. Briefly, this points to the obvious choice that I have to make between his book and my newspaper,

his bicycle ride and my nap, his bedtime conversation and my walk... his life and mine! But miraculously, I have never encountered tantrums in toy shops, never was a tear shed over ice creams and colas forbidden on medical advice, and mealtimes have never been a battlefield.

Attention given whenever it is rightfully due, even though it may mean a sacrifice of personal comfort for one party, does set the stage for accepting that which is not so rightfully due.

It is not as though consumerism has not caught on. My husband swears that for the last three weeks the following conversation took place each time father and son drove out together in our ageing car. Sometimes as often as four times a day. It never changes.

Appa, when will we get a new car?

Soon as we save some money love.

Shall we take a BMW...?

No! a real wala.

Not just now, we don't have the money...

*Awww... jab mein born nahin hua tha tab jyada paise wali jobs nahin mili tume?*

Well...

*Lekin mujhe to mil sakti hain.*

Sure.

Yipeeee.

Well, this is reality too, and father and son dream on together. When there is happiness, honesty and comfort in the present, dreams can only add to the joy. My son has a whopper of a car collection built from a toy car fixation of the early years, aided and abetted by his father who made a picnic out of every weekend visit to the motor garage to fix the ailing Ambi. Even before he could distinguish colours, the apple of our eye could distinguish between various models even after dark, by observing their headlights. He is now picking up differences between steering wheels.

To my delight and unsurpassed pride, I find that his powers of observation sharpened through this activity, have percolated into other areas – as into amazing little details in his artworks – the palaces and chariots as well as the trucks, buses and space wars that he draws. And believe it or not, he even drew an incredibly detailed pyramid (and called it 'pyramint' – shyly – because he knew he was making a mistake).

Yes, progressive thinking informs us that all children are smart and know just where and when to draw the line, provided the line is drawn clear and sharp. But often it is the parents who are not smart enough to do that. Our friend SK's seven year old daughter is one such smart kid (which means SK is a smart parent, no doubt). As father walked daughter to the bus stop one morning, a few days short of her birthday, this is the conversation that took place.

You know what I want for my birthday?

What, darling?

I want a Barbie doll...

(Silence! SK is appalled but doesn't want to show it.)

...or I want a poodle... a pink poodle!

(More silence. SK is horrified!)

...But I know you will not give it to me.

I know you will give me a nice book of a casino or a game...

There was no animosity in the child's voice. Only a matter of fact, albeit humorous acceptance of her dad's political correctness and a disarming honesty that felt no fear at confessing her own desires in the face of that correctness. A parent-child relationship to be proud of, no doubt. But one that requires hard work and sacrifice, honesty and togetherness. And of course there are times when you want to hide out in the doghouse!

# Starting afresh

ROOPA SHANKER

THE long summer after the ISC exams was enjoyable. Friends, parties, late nights – all were allowed. When July set in and my mother asked what I wanted to do, I was confused. Like any other adolescent, I wanted to do many things – all at one time. After much debate and discussion, I joined Lady Irvin College. My mother agreed because it was away from the ‘campus’, my father because it was a girls college, and I because the college offered a course which I wanted to take – ‘child development’.

During the three years for my graduation I was convinced that I wanted to take my master’s degree in no other subject but child development. The next two years taught me how to deal with children, their personalities, their creativity, and many other facets and skills.

After marriage I moved to Lucknow and taught in a secondary

school for a year. The VIIIth class which I taught did not give me the same satisfaction I had enjoyed during my practical classes in the pre-school run by our department – Saraswati Puri. I realised that it was the children’s ‘age’ which bothered me, but since the salary was good, I continued.

By the summer of ’92 I had a beautiful child of my own. As I held the little girl in my arms, happy, it struck me that I wanted to start my own pre-school, where I could be with little children, see them grow, teach them new creative things, love them and above all make them happy. I dreamt of having a handful of children... among them my own daughter, playing on the swing, singing to the tune of the casio, listening to stories, running to hug me. I discussed the possibility with my husband. I thought he would laugh it off. I was wrong.

We shifted to Allahabad with our two month old daughter. He resigned from his central government job and I from the school in Lucknow. We were 'jobless' and with a little baby to take care of. I worried whether we had taken the right decision.

There was a vacant plot of land adjacent to our house which my husband decided would be appropriate for the school. The capital investment was huge—building, furniture, stationery, advertisement and maintenance. The family was apprehensive. My parents were unhappy that my husband had resigned a permanent government job and was thinking of starting his own practice in the High Court. No one in his family was an advocate and to build a practice would need time, patience and money.

**A**fter many 'round-table' conferences my husband decided to go ahead with the construction of the school. After getting three rooms ready, he told me that he would not, in any way, look after or manage the school. It was up to me to manage it as I pleased. He wanted to be free to practice law in the High Court—a profession that had fascinated him from childhood.

'Little Scholars' opened on 15 July 1993. Every morning I would get up at 6 am, get ready, leave my baby with mother and be in the office at 8 am sharp. No one came. Days passed and just when I thought my three month old would be the only one studying in Little Scholars, four children joined in the last week of July. Three more soon followed and I engaged a staff member—not really to 'teach' the children but for company.

Limited funds, limited children, a small baby and a husband who had started off 'on his own'. There were problems. I wanted to teach the way I did during my practical classes in college. I was impatient and wanted

instant success. I complained. I cried. I wanted to close down the school. There was no way I could teach seven children with no toys, no puzzles, no celebration of festivals. All that I had been taught in my college days, during my masters course, appeared a waste. I confided to my husband, but from his expressions I couldn't make out whether he agreed with me or not.

**E**arly one morning, he told me to plant a seed in the school garden. The very next day he asked me to check the colour of the flowers. God, I thought, this is the ultimate. He has gone mad. 'How do you expect to get flowers in a single day?' I asked. 'The same way you want to be successful in school in three months. When you plant a seed, you have to nurture it, water it, love it and care for it. Only then does it grow and blossom into a flower.'

I came back to my room and looked at my daughter. She had grown taller. I hadn't really 'seen' her the past a few months. I realised I had stopped enjoying the present—all the time thinking about the future and its problems. I couldn't tell when Srishti had given her first 'social smile'. I decided not to lose hope. I hugged my daughter. I cried. The next day, looking at those seven children in school, I was filled with enthusiasm. I decided to 'adapt' my school to Allahabad. After all, this is what I was taught. Teaching was not limited to sophisticated toys, ready-made puzzles, computers, or cassette players. I recalled my classes at the Mobile Creche and the 'slum'.

First I decided to give Suneeta, my colleague, an orientation course. I told her that it did not matter if the children coloured their elephants green or red, how hundreds of things could be made from paper. Instead of the usual nursery rhymes, I taught her rhymes related to children's everyday

activities which they could enjoy. I introduced a uniform for Little Scholars. All children cannot afford to wear new, colourful dresses to school everyday. There had to be a uniformity in dress so that the children coming from the lower income group did not feel deprived.

I introduced simple books and notebooks, bags, tiffin and water bottle as part of the school kit. I was aware that parents want to 'see' what their child has been taught in school. I had to give them what they expected in order to retain the children. Only then could I introduce children to activities other than writing skills. However, I was clear about not forcing a child to do what he could not. I started them off with plenty of pre-writing skills—circles, strokes, semi-circles, patterns and scribbling.

**I** introduced a sand pit in the school. It was lovely to see children engrossed in creating different things out of sand. It was as if they were in a dream world—making mountains, wells, temples, the moon, sun and stars. One day a parent asked me if there was any 'construction' going on in the school campus as he had found 'tonnes of sand' in his son's shoes. I burst out laughing. He was annoyed and wanted me to stop this 'dirty' game of the sand pit. I smiled but said it was not possible for me to deprive children of their dream world. He withdrew his child. The next four months, however, saw seven more admissions and our session of '92-93 ended with 13 children.

The next year began on a brighter note. I engaged another staff member, one maid and a *dai* to assist the little ones in their toilet and to keep a 'watch' over children when they were engaged in outdoor play. Another problem arose. A child's grandmother demanded that our maid not touch her child's bag, tiffin-box or water bottle.

as she was of a lower caste. I was shocked. So many years since Independence and we still practised untouchability and casteism. As I refused to terminate my dai's services, one more parent withdrew her child. It was depressing; how could I work in such circumstances?

**H**ere I was trying my utmost to give parents, guardians and their children my best. But instead of encouragement I was receiving sneers and criticism. This time it was Suneeta, my colleague and friend, who told me that we should continue to do what we thought right. I welcomed the advice of a person who had lived in the city all her life and probably knew the people's pulse.

Together, we decided to give our children the best possible time they could have in the four hours they were with us. We made puppets and put up puppet shows, organised fancy dress competitions, celebrated flag hoisting on Republic Day and played Holi. Soon another session came to an end.

The third academic year saw Little Scholars with three teachers. By this time I knew better what parents wanted from the school. I tried to organise a 'creativity workshop' for parents. They were asked to make different things from plasticine and *aata*. We welcomed their suggestions and criticism in order to make our school better. Saturday was planned as an 'activity day' with children engaged in gardening, salad eating, *rakhi* making, mask making and so on. We started to celebrate all festivals, and for the first time organised an annual day with children dancing and acting in small groups. All children were given an opportunity to be on the stage so that they could overcome 'stranger anxiety' and develop confidence. Gradually a separate room was constructed for use as a play house where

each child could do whatever he/she wanted for half an hour, be it painting, scribbling, puzzle making—in a group or all alone.

One day a couple came to me with their son who was hyperactive and a slow learner. I found that the boy suffered from various behavioural problems. He did not listen to his parents, was not toilet trained and would roll on the ground on the least pretext. I decided to admit him to Little Scholars. He had attended a special school, but 'mainstreaming' was what was called for. We were patient but firm and he gradually improved. Besides the school curriculum, we introduced him to different foods. He soon started eating things other than glucose biscuits.

**T**he parents were very co-operative and eager to help in the activities planned for their child. Today he can read, write and has passed the IInd standard exam. He enjoys being with other children. Besides, we now have another 'special child'. She was afflicted by meningitis at the age of two and had difficulty in reading, writing, walking and running due to paralysis of her left hand and leg. Together, we are attempting to help make her self-dependent.

Setting up a school and running it requires time and patience. Looking back, I often wonder how all this became possible. My dream has come true. My college, my teachers... the experiences have been manifold. They cannot all be put on paper. My husband, my parents, above all my mother-in-law encouraged me and stood by me in those initial years of struggle. Today Little Scholars has a reputation in the city as a school which teaches children to be creative, caring, happy and good human beings. I hope to continue to work for children. The only reward that I wish for is their happy and contented smiles.



# Reaching out to children

SONYA ACHARYA

THE first day in school is an emotional experience for a teacher. The older children have moved on to another class, yet relationships forged during the past year leave something of a vacuum which both teachers and children have to cope with. There is a new class full of fresh faces looking up expectantly at their new teacher in an unfamiliar classroom. Many are happy and carefree, their exuberance already brimming over. Others are shy, but one can tell that a little coaxing will draw them out of their shell. So many

expressions and emotions appear on these little faces. A closer look at some of them reveals deeply-etched feelings of insecurity, reticence, apprehension, even fear. One wants to reach out to these children, hoping to give them the best a teacher can offer.

The first task is to remove the fear of school, which to many a child is a nightmare, and make it an enjoyable place to be in. A bit of extra attention or a word of encouragement makes a huge difference in restoring confidence and self-esteem by giving

children the recognition and the approval they so desperately need. Assigning small responsibilities, like carrying books to another class or taking a note to the office, are prized tasks for little children which they view with great pride. By sometimes delegating these tasks to the less confident or the low-achieving child and by bestowing praise afterwards, their level of self-worth can be greatly enhanced.

**B**oth as teachers and parents, we often tend to forget that the child before us is just a child. From an early age tremendous pressures and high expectations are brought to bear upon the child both at home and at school, and the great emotional distress manifests itself in many ways. Some withdraw completely, others become socially aggressive, while many children are simply unable to cope with school work.

In my view, more than ever before, achieving high grades is not the be all and the end all of schooling. It is far more important to view the child holistically—looking at his emotional development, building his self-esteem and sensitizing him to his environment, his community and to his responsibilities. It is imperative to increase the child's awareness of events happening around him and sharpen his urge to learn. We have to constantly remind ourselves that a happy child is the better developed child, one who would be more equipped to cope with adulthood, be socially sensitive and form long-lasting relationships and acquire confidence to find happiness and contentment later in life.

Children though often emotionally transparent may carry hidden signs which can tell you about their inner tensions and anxieties. The emotional disturbance within is reflected in myriad ways. It may lead to frustra-

tion, fears and impulsive behaviour and render the child ineffectual in school. Much of this baggage comes from the home and may have roots in unfulfilled parental expectations or in troubled relationships among the parents. The birth of a sibling, or even the admission of a brother or sister to the same school, can sometimes trigger off behavioural changes.

Manmohini Gujral, a senior counsellor at Don Bosco School, attributes this situation to the breakdown of the joint family and insecure home conditions and feels that regular counselling, remedial teaching and parent-teacher meetings are essential to deal with the problem. Involving children in community work and in organizing social campaigns such as environmental conservation and anti-pollution drives, helps focus their attention in a positive manner, away from their own particular predicament.

**A**ccording to Shobha Gopalakrishnan, "The family is the child's first teacher; the home, his first school. The sooner both teachers and parents recognize this, the better it would be for the growth of the child. Unless both teachers and parents work in tandem, the child cannot benefit to the fullest. Often parents choose to depend entirely on the teacher, blaming every shortcoming on the school. On the flip side, teachers too point fingers at the parents accusing them of being indifferent, indulgent and ineffective as role models and facilitators."

"It is imperative that parents and teachers work together and make school an extension of the home, a home away from home as the cliché goes. For this, a convivial atmosphere, understanding, friendship, patience and discipline all play contributory roles. Parent-teacher meetings must not be across-the-desk report card encounters but should be frequent,

friendly and a two way process. Problems should be frankly discussed so that psychological factors are tactfully dealt with. Most importantly, as both school and home contribute to the child's upbringing, paradoxes must be avoided at all cost, otherwise the child will be thoroughly confused."

Dolly Majumdar speaks of poor performance as a major problem that teachers encounter in every class. The problem can be tackled by analyzing it and by getting to know the child. What is his home environment like? Are the parents helping the child to learn and grow? Are values practised at home and those imparted at school in conflict? Who are his friends? 'As a language teacher, I am entrusted with the task of equipping a child with the skills of communication. By involving the students in group work, pair work, enactment of roles and so on, they are given the scope to express themselves. It also helps me identify children who are diffident or shy to speak out. By making them in charge of a group or giving them the role of a spokesperson for the class helps instil confidence, and a word of praise from the teacher works wonders!'

**A**rtwork, theatre workshops and children's writings reveal a lot about their innermost fears and emotions, and exercises in class give me a better understanding of my students. Sentences beginning with 'I am sad when...'; 'I feel happy when...'; 'I hate...' are surprisingly candid. Using these insights I am able to handle the child and sometimes even deal with the parents. Unhappy relationships between parents can traumatize children and these situations need to be discussed. Difficulties at home and at school ought not be brushed under the carpet and must be handled in a sensitive way. I often deal with an individual child's problems in general

terms – without of course naming the child – and during the discussion other children reveal their own problems, their fears, insecurities and rivalries. This often acts as a catharsis for the class.

**I** approach these problems as if they are normal, that they occur in some way or another in every home. The issues could range from insecurity and fear arising from parental separation to feelings of inadequacy arising from linguistic disadvantages, 'my mother cannot speak English', to material needs, 'we don't have a car'; 'We cannot afford to have birthday parties, or even attend them.' It is my aim to build confidence and pride in what they have, to instil in them the need to appreciate different values.

It takes painstaking care to gain a child's trust and this requires a great deal of patience and sensitivity to the child's needs. This is especially true of children who are aggressive and even hostile, both to the teacher and to their playmates. These are children who frequently feel unwanted at home and are accustomed to being reprimanded, yelled at, possibly even beaten and battered. The teacher needs to hold the child's hand, and when the child puts it to the test, not to let go. The child's self-image has to be constantly bolstered and supported by positive, loving inputs. Often the teacher feels that a breakthrough has been achieved, but incidents at home or at school may cause a regression.

This is of course very frustrating and demoralizing for the teacher, and dealing with the situation in a cramped classroom of 40 children and more can be extremely taxing. Parents are called in for a dialogue, but often they do not respond. Or if they do make an appearance, many become defensive and even uncooperative. Still it is impor-

tant to plug away and try as far as possible to forge a partnership where parents, children and teachers could sort out the issues. Parents have to be encouraged to review their expectations of their children, to avoid comparing them with their more successful siblings or cousins, and to be more supportive of them. Parents too need to be reassured of their children's worth and teachers must reiterate the positive aspects of the child's character and behaviour.

It is disappointing when, for whatever reason, parents are unable or unwilling to take the necessary steps to change their attitudes towards their children. It then becomes increasingly incumbent upon the teacher to take charge of the child even though the response is not encouraging. Indeed, this must be carried over to the other teachers so that the support systems for the child are continually strengthened.

**T**hankfully this isn't always the case, and increasingly parents and teachers are both coming forward in the interest of the child. Parent-teacher meetings have become a regular feature in several schools and some even engage the services of professional counsellors. Some of the more affluent schools have smaller classrooms and the higher teacher-to-child ratio facilitates the giving of quality time and attention to the students.

We teachers have our own children to deal with and form partnerships with our children and their teachers. That in itself is a learning experience which we then carry into the classroom. If both teachers and parents were to remember that the focus of attention is the child and not our own personal problems and egos, we shall all benefit from this partnership. This will better equip the child to face the ever-increasing complexities of life and living.

# Parent involvement

ANKUR MADAN

PARENTS are often perceived as partners in their children's education. The teacher-parent dyad is viewed with much speculation and constitutes an area of interest for educationists, school administrators and policy-makers, both in India and the West.

The parent is viewed as a custodian, teacher aide, or helper in delivering services to children in the classroom. And 'parent involvement in school', by definition, is a process of actualizing the potential of parents, of helping them discover their strength, potentialities and talents and of using them for the benefit of themselves and the families. (Morrison, 1978).

Early research in the UK (Wall, 1947), stressed the following benefits of parent involvement in the education of their children: (a) it helped parents take a keen interest in their children's education; (b) helped the teacher to understand the child; (c) encouraged the child in his lessons. Wall, however, concluded that despite the expression of vaguely positive attitudes, it was hardly surprising that in many schools cooperation existed only where the need for it arose on both sides.

J. Krishnamurthy gave the role of the parent, the teacher, and the children equal importance in the educational process. He argued that the

family, with its separate tendencies, often encouraged the general process of isolation, thereby becoming a deteriorating factor in society. By being absorbed in their own problems, many parents shift the responsibility for the well-being of their children to the teacher. It is therefore important that the educator focuses on the education of the parents as well.

Associations between parental involvement in school and academic performance of children have been mapped by several researchers. The Plowden Report, CACE (1967) carried interviews with 3000 parents and found a clear association between parental encouragement and children's educational performance. However, it also pointed to the difficulty in working out the direction of causality. Parental attitude to education, involving interest in school, encouragement to children, and aspirations for children's educational and occupational careers were listed as some of the factors influencing the school performance of the child.

Family processes associated with academic success were identified by Dornbusch and Wood (1989). Among them was communication style. For instance, emphasis on conformity with others was associated with lower grades and emphasis on

diversity of ideas with higher grades. Similarly, early autonomy in decision-making as against joint decision-making in adolescence was associated with delinquent behaviour. Reaction to grades, parenting styles, and educational expectations of parents were some of the other processes identified by the authors.

**A**lthough available research corroborates the finding that if parents take an active interest in their children's schooling they tend to do better, common observation also suggests that parents, teachers and the school administration view parent involvement in a varied and sometimes narrow sense.

Perceptions of parents regarding their involvement in the education of their child are contrasting and sometimes confused. All parents express the need for greater participation and interaction with teachers and the administrative staff, but confusion arises when they are asked about the precise activities they would like to be part of and participate in. Parents primarily express concern about the academic progress of their child and have innumerable questions relating to their ward's performance in class and how they could improve. Parents have been reported to ask specific questions on how they could increase IQ levels, improve concentration abilities, and whether memory capsules work.

Interestingly, even teachers show greater interest in meeting parents of children who are not doing well in class. A parent was reportedly told that there was no need for her to attend the PTA meetings as her child was doing well in school. This preoccupation with academic success on the part of both parents and teachers is understandable within the current social scenario where tolerance for mediocrity and acceptance for the average

child is low. However, this obsession sometimes goes too far and the seemingly pleasant interaction between teachers and parents can take an ugly turn. What follows is often a cheap mud-slinging match where both opponents try to outdo one another. The following is an extract of one such interaction witnessed by the author:  
Parent: Madam, I do not think my daughter deserves a B grade in this test paper. She has made only two mistakes, you cannot penalize the child in this manner.

Teacher: I am sorry Sir, but you have no business to interfere with my work. I know my job and do not think there is anything wrong with the grading system I have adopted. I have intentionally given her a low grade so that she would work harder next time.

**C**omplaining about the child's performance and behaviour in class is a common observation at PTA meetings. Teachers have been heard discussing only what the child is not good at rather than what she may also be doing well in. Poor handwriting, slow in mental maths, talks too much in class, should improve her spellings are some comments that one hears far more often than: has good thinking skills, is imaginative, or enjoys reading story books. Not only do teachers communicate such negative sentiments, they also traumatise the child by seeking explanations for their past behaviour or performance, as if to reassure themselves of the authenticity of the charges levelled.

Parents on the other hand, make matters worse by making counter complaints, either about the teachers or against their own children's behaviour at home. Sometimes they also express disbelief at the teachers' allegations as they find the charges contradictory to what they have observed at home. Such a mismatch of

beliefs and an obvious lack of communication demonstrates the need to bridge gaps and find missing links.

**T**o reaffirm the need to improve parent-teacher relationships, views expressed by parents of children attending special education programmes in regular schools may be stated. While education professionals support the research on the all important role parents can play in the education of children with special needs, the reality is different. This was discovered by the author during the course of interviews with a few parents and teachers.

A number of parents expressed their dismay over the insufficiency of information they had been furnished about the special education programme their child had attended. Some parents had never met the teachers and had a vague idea about the components and objectives of the programme. A visibly concerned parent expressed helplessness in doing anything for her disabled child's learning. She had absolutely no idea about how she could work with her at home since the school had never made any effort to educate her. This lack of communication between the school and parents, particularly in the case of children with special needs, was highlighted at every interaction.

Parents of children in another school, however, gave a far more positive indication of the interaction. Parents were not only kept well-informed but were invited to the school on a regular basis to discuss their child's academic performance and behaviour. The parent of a child from a lower socio-economic background, attending a high-paying convent school, expressed sentiments not commonly observed. According to the mother, her child's success lay in the teacher adopting an affectionate, compassion-

ate and understanding attitude, not only towards her child but also towards the parents. She now wanted to establish a relationship wherein she could express her own personal feelings and discuss her domestic problems with her child's teachers.

**A**lthough parent-teacher meetings, seminars and workshops on child development and related issues are organized by many schools from time to time, most parents show little interest in attending them. Reasons quoted for this lack of enthusiasm vary: inconvenient timings, too crowded, irrelevant issues, prefer a personalized one-to-one interaction. Parents often seek clarification or answers to specific queries dealing with day-to-day practical problems they face with their children. The kind of food to be packed in the tiffin box, the need for written notification about change in uniform schedules, bus routes – are some of the common issues raised in parent-teacher interactions.

Parents concern about their children's behaviour or issues that deal with their psychological well being are expressed on fewer occasions as compared with those concerning academic performance. More often than not, teachers are more likely to broach the subject of behaviour, either through written communication in case of instances of gross misconduct, or during regular interactions.

Concern about the behaviour of an eight year old girl was communicated by a teacher during a meeting. It was heartening to see how much time the teacher spent with the parents in figuring out the reasons for the attention-seeking deviant behaviour of the child. During the discussion it was realized that the birth of a younger sibling may have made the child feel insecure, and hence the problem. When parents and teachers get together and

view the problem at hand as a common concern, it is likely that the problem will get resolved and be in the child's interest.

While parents complain of aloofness and lack of concern on the part of teachers, teachers perceive parents as either totally unconcerned or too interfering in their work, 'amateurs encroaching on their professional territory.' A special educator in a school conveyed her incapacity in being able to explain to parents of children with learning difficulties the nature of their child's problems. She felt that parents often found it difficult to accept the problem, became defensive, and deployed their energies in blaming the school and teachers for their child's condition. This in turn led to a lack of cooperation from their end, hampering the remedial process.

**P**arental involvement then, has many flavours, some bitter and some sweet. Efforts to make parents partners in their children's education have been made by administrators at different levels and to varying degrees. The range of activities that have been experimented with include incorporating means of information transfer, individual and group meetings at home and at school, deploying parents to help with fund-raising chores or with learning tasks in and out of the classroom, and establishing sundry community education programmes. Involvement of parents in child assessment and school governance has also seen a gradual development, particularly in the West (Topping, 1986).

Organising 'parent-melas', an innovative method adopted by an education board in the country, is an effort to bridge the gap between parents and schools and to provide a forum for exchange of views and voicing of concerns. Child development experts are invited to address ques-

tions raised by teachers, school principals and, of course, parents. Slide shows and films are used to generate discussion on issues that parents and teachers experience in their day-to-day interactions with children.

**P**arental involvement in the education of young children has been recognized as playing a pivotal role by researchers, educationists and thinkers alike. Active involvement of parents leading to better academic performance by children has received unanimous research support. However, there is considerable ambiguity as regards the actual role that parents can play in the process. Parents perception of their involvement sometimes conflicts with that held by teachers. Transaction of information leads to exchange of unpleasant or sometimes contradictory views, victimizing the child in the process.

Concerns regarding academic performance override other matters, both on the part of teachers and parents. While parents complain of being isolated and denied information, teachers also express an inability to convey messages to amateur listeners. Informal, pleasant and frequent interactions using expert opinion to mediate, and the media to communicate, could perhaps make the catch-phrase 'parents as partners' realize its true meaning.

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# Experiences from child art

DEVI PRASAD

CHILD art provides a window to the world of the child. My experience of watching through that window over many years revealed to me a new world, a world that is not the same as that of the adult. In fact, they are two very different worlds—one the adult's and the other the child's. Without proper knowledge and understanding, it is not easy for grown-ups to enter and understand the child's world.

Some people think that a child draws pictures the way he does because of a lack of requisite skills to see things as they are in reality. A child, they believe, cannot draw realistically because he has not yet learnt to translate the three dimensional visual reality onto a two dimensional surface, i.e. on paper or board. Visually, the three dimensional aspect, many people think, is an essential element of the art of drawing and painting.

There is yet another argument often put forward. The child has to become an adult one day. Therefore, the effort of the child to communicate his experiences in the form of pictures is only a part of the larger learning process, i.e. learning to reach adulthood. Hence, children must learn to see visual reality the same way as most adults do. In other words, to reach adulthood children can learn only by imitating adults and through their guidance. I find this argument lacks respect for childhood. It also indicates an absence of a sound educational perspective.

My observations have provided me a different perspective to child development. Experts may probably call it naive or romantic! But I am convinced that if allowed and encouraged to enjoy and live healthily in their own world, and to climb their own ladder of development at their own pace,

children will be better prepared for adulthood. As well-fulfilled individuals, they will be prepared to face life boldly and intelligently, and with fewer inhibitions.

There is also the question of the artistic status of children's work. Some well-known authorities on cognitive development and children's art expression use the same yardstick for judging child art which they use for judging the art of the adult. These scholars do, however, accept that children's work has moved many people with its artistic quality; it has allured many a connoisseur. Yet, these experts argue that we cannot evade the issue whether child art holds the same meaning for a youngster as it does for an adult. They question whether a child artist is significantly involved with the production or is wholly enveloped by the processes of creation, or whatever his attitude towards his work, if his skill utilize processes akin to those marshalled by gifted adult artists.

I do not understand this approach. True, different kinds of elements are present in the act of children painting pictures—indeed, very different from those that are involved in the work of adult artists. However, they are two different worlds. And, is it not true that to expect a child to follow adult norms and practices is to deprive him of his own world, his childhood?

My experience with children expressing themselves through art and understanding the mind of the child, has convinced me that children's art must not be seen through the eyes of adults and judged by their standards. Whatever an uninhibited child does with pencil/colours and paper or with clay comes out as something that he has absorbed from the world he sees and

'knows'. This is different from what the adult eye and mind sees and knows.

We have to keep in mind that some things the child does bear characteristics of adulthood. But that kind of work need not be, and is often not, the product of the child's own personality. Whatever the child produces from his child-nature is his and his alone; this no adult can produce. It needs to be pointed out that adults, particularly parents, often do not have a grasp of the subject of child art. They are so extravagant in their praise of whatever the child draws or makes that it does not help in channelising the growth of the child. Hence, it is essential that they try to understand the child and his basic needs.

**T**he child's logic is so different from the adult's that one often wonders which is more logical. Franz Cizek once said: 'The wonderful logic of the child is often ruined by a spoiled logic of the adult. And wrong education cripples the child spiritually. The child thinks quite simply and logically. For instance, once a girl drew a house—a rectangle and a triangle—and asked me: "Is this right?" I answered: "Of course." But the child continued: "The teacher said it is wrong if one makes it so." "Why?" I asked. "He said that the roof must always project, otherwise the rain-water will run down along the walls of the house. But suddenly the child began to laugh. I asked why she laughed. "Because it cannot rain in a picture." How logical a child is!'

Franz Cizek was the first to use the term 'child art'. He gave the child dignity and freedom to express boldly and artistically. I feel that Cizek's vision of the child's mind is that kind of truth which every parent must realize and practice.

Some 20th century artists were so moved by child art that it became

an inspiration for their own creations. This is a phenomenon similar to the modern artists learning from the drawings and paintings of the cave dwellers and tribal people. But the fact is that the artistic status of true child art is different and unique; it belongs to the world of the child and not of the adult.

I want to draw attention to the diagnostic aspect of child art, particularly where it relates to the status of the child in the family. Teachers and parents of child artists must be aware that they can learn a tremendous amount about the mind of their children through their work. It would help them become aware about the needs of children as also about the experiences children pass through.

The individual is by nature an artist, a creator. Whatever he receives is not with passivity, and in his mind it is not an accurate physical representation of the objects felt and/or seen around. In his subconscious the individual continuously adapts, transforming it into human imagery tinged with values held to be part of his sentiment and imagination.

**T**he concept of art as essential to good education has been long known to human society. On the influence of art in the early stages of growing up, Plato wrote: 'We must look for artists and craftsmen capable of perceiving the real nature of what is beautiful, and then our young men living as it were in a healthy climate will benefit, because all the works of art they see and hear influence them for good, like the breeze from some healthy country, leading them from earliest childhood into close sympathy and conformity with beauty and reason.'

'And that is ... why this stage of education is crucial. For rhythm and harmony penetrate deeply into the mind and take a most powerful hold on it, and if education is good, it brings

and imparts grace and beauty, if it is bad, the reverse. And moreover, the proper training we propose to give will make a man quick to perceive the shortcomings of works of art or nature, whose ugliness he will rightly dislike. Anything beautiful he will welcome gladly, will make it his own and so grow in true goodness of character. Anything ugly he will rightly condemn and dislike, even when he is still young and cannot understand the reason for so doing, while when reason comes he will recognize and welcome her as a familiar friend because of his upbringing.... In my view that is the purpose of this stage of education.'

**P**lato asks the question: 'And are not these things which our young men must pursue, if they are to perform their function in life properly?' He himself provides the answer: 'They must. The graphic arts are full of the same qualities and so are the related crafts, weaving and embroidery, architecture and manufacture of furniture of all kinds; and the same is true of living things, animals and plants. For, in all of these we find beauty and ugliness. And ugliness of form and bad rhythm, and disharmony are akin to poor quality expression and character, and their opposites are akin to and represent good character and discipline.'

Music is one of the most powerful of mediums creating and influencing rhythm and harmony of the soul. Hence, firm bondage, if created between them, will in turn generate grace. One who has received that kind of an education, i.e. of the inner life, will have the skill to understand the weakness of particular arts as well as of nature. With good taste he will adore truth, draw joy from it and internalize it in his personality. He

1. Plato, *The Republic*. Penguin Books, 1955, p. 163.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 162.



will dislike the bad and the evil and decry it openly, even in his youth when he may not be fully aware of the reasons behind it. In other words, according to Plato, proper art education helps the individual to develop a sense of good and evil.

Creative activities provide the discipline in which the senses intuitively seek unity, harmony, proportion and wholeness of experience. The use of mediums and tools – clay, cotton, wool, leather, wood, stone, brushes, potter's wheel, the saw – impose on this discipline by their very physical nature. Moreover, they draw the creator closer to nature, which alone is the supreme example of harmony, sympathy and union. These are the same laws on which the human community depends for its own unity and integrity.

**A**rt activities create a deep sense of freedom in the child, which leads to full fruition of all his gifts and talents, to his true and stable happiness in adult life. Art, actually, leads the child out of himself. Children engaged in spontaneous creative activities are happier than those who may do well in their academic work but do not take part in art activities. Children's spontaneous paintings are direct evidence of their psychological and physiological disposition. Child art has more clinical value than any other form of evidence. Creative activities also help develop self-confidence in the child.

Art activities can liberate individuals from their aggression and other repressed instincts accumulated during early childhood. To give a simple example: At our school in Gandhi's *ashram*, we had a boy from the Gond tribal community. The Gonds were known as a warrior community. The boy's father, a worker in the national struggle against colonial rule, had been arrested and kept in solitary confinement for several years.

One can understand the psychological state of the family, particularly of the children. This boy of ten was not only endowed with lots of energy and tribal spirit, but was also emotionally tense. He often became violent with younger children and beat them up.

I admitted him to my class and provided him the freedom to spend as much time as he liked in art and craft activities. Within a few months he was drawing pictures of historical heroes. He was also encouraged to join a group of boys and girls to chop firewood for the kitchen. Chopping wood with an axe helped him to give vent to the extra energy and violence stored within. In a year or so he was a different person, responsible and active, and also a good artist. I often wonder what would have happened had he gone to an ordinary school.

In many homes I have observed that children who are engaged in art activities are happy and more alert. They have a close relationship with their families and become a source of joy for the parents. Even at a very early stage if the child is given an opportunity to handle simple art material, he starts scribbling in order to experiment with the material. He uses it to convey the urges of his inner world to a sympathetic spectator, to the parent from whom he expects an encouraging response. It provides an opportunity for dialogue between the child and parent. Until the age of three or four the average child has not developed a spoken language to the extent of being able to communicate with someone who is prepared to listen. However, artistic activities provide to the child a language he needs to give expression to his inner self. If the child is unable to express freely, his feelings get distorted and often become destructive.

It is not sufficient for the child to be able express himself through art.

He needs an audience that will give him recognition and appreciate his work. Franz Cizek, the Viennese painter, described one of his experiences: 'After drawing and painting for an hour, I discussed with a dozen children from three to seven, their pictures. That means we discussed them together. I had finished when six year old Susan started sobbing. When I asked her why she cried, she said: "But you have not criticized my picture." Needless to say, I had done it, but I did not know that Susan was outside when I discussed and praised her picture. Susan was a shy child, but when she did not get "significance" or thought she had not, she asked for it.'

**A** child needs this kind of recognition for building a healthy self-image. The role of the family is even more important in this regard. The child needs messages from his parents which will assure him that they trust him and respect his personality. After all, the health of the family depends upon the degree of intimacy in relationships and recognition of and respect for each other's personality. A family is happy in which the children are happy and active: Can human society be considered healthy if its units – individual families – are not happy?

Creative activities, during every stage of childhood, prepare the individual to communicate freely and courageously and at the same time to become an integral part of nature and life as a whole. I will conclude with a quote from Schiller: 'One of the most important tasks of culture is to submit man to the influence of form, even in his merely physical life: to make this life aesthetic by introducing the rule of beauty wherever possible; because only from the aesthetic, and not from the physical state, can morality develop.'<sup>3</sup>

3. Quoted by Herbert Read in *Education Through Art*. Faber and Faber, 1956, p. 265.

# Restoring play

SUDARSHAN KHANNA

MY interest in toys was rekindled when I was in my mid-twenties. While teaching a course at NID (National Institute of Design) on creative manipulation of materials, I looked around for examples of intelligent use of common materials. Toys, particularly those made by artisans and sold at *melas*, were an outstanding example of not only material science but product design as well. This was some 25 years ago. Since then I have discovered other interesting things about these tiny products of play.

However, in the last two decades our great heritage of toys made by children, families and artisans is on a rapid decline. Left unattended and uncared for, it will slowly die. The organized sector of the toy industry, although growing rapidly in money terms every year, is not doing a good job. There is no product development, research or concern for 'good tools of play.' On the other hand, it is a joy to see a sparkle in the eyes of children when they make and play with real toys, often without spending any money.

Let me first give you an idea of what types of toys are available, their play value and the situation today.

Self-made toys constitute an invaluable play activity yet have remained largely uncared and unnoticed. As a child I could make 10-15 types of toys but these simple ideas are not known today. After some years of informal research, I had over 150 ideas listed. Most of them did not require any special materials or tools. These toys provided more than just play and fun. The making of these toys could introduce the basics of the 3H:

learning by hands, heart, and head. No other playthings can replace these 'toys which work.' Children learn a great deal by trying out and sharing the process of making these toys.

Let me give some examples. Children roll a leaf to make a toy flute. I remember that as a child it was fun not only to roll a flute but also help a younger child to do the same. Children often notice the sound quality of their flutes, perhaps their first lesson in the science and art of music.

As kids we made our own kites because we could make four kites for the price of one. We gained not only savings in terms of money but an introduction to the finer aspects of a flying object. A neighbourhood friend, a child of 10, once brought me a toy from Kerala, a spinning fan housed in a seed. The palm leaf fan blades rotated when the spindle, housed in a rubber plant seed, was rotated. The seed was made hollow to accommodate the spindle, i.e., the pulp inside the seed was removed, but without cutting or breaking the seed. This puzzled me till I learnt that children left the seeds near an ant hill. The ants ate away the inside of the seed and the children got a clean shell necessary for making the toy. This seemingly simple, innocent act of involving the co-operation of ants had a far reaching impact. Which toy in the market today can provide such a profound experience, that too at no cost?

There are many toys virtually made of 'nothing', and yet they provide endless fun to children. A tiny paper helicopter, a cracker, a jumping frog, a paper butterfly fluttering on the same law of physics as the one which

helps lift airplanes into the air. But alas, the culture of making toys by children of their own free will is disappearing. Occasionally I come across children in slums making these toys, primarily because they cost nothing. Yet they would be of great value to any child, rich or poor.

**F**amily made toys constitute the basic things of play. Making dolls out of rags was a common activity in the family, but now one rarely comes across family made dolls. Earlier, mothers made tiny animals and birds out of *atta*, kneaded flour. While baking chappatis these toys too were baked. A large variety of toys were made in every home. All this has almost disappeared.

Dynamic folk toys are made by artisans, as full-time work or as seasonal income supplementing activity – playthings which make sound, movements, action and so on. The flute, wind wheels, acrobatic figures, rattles, moving snakes, the striking snake are some examples. These toys were earlier sold at melas and fairs.

In 1972, I remember visiting a big fair in Ahmedabad on Janmashtami day. There were several stalls displaying the figurines of Krishna and Radha. Some smaller stalls sold hand-made scrap metal toys, typical of Ahmedabad. A few women were selling rag dolls. I also found over 100 toy makers selling a variety of action toys – wind wheels, flutes, paper snakes, reed striking snakes, jiggling puppets and so on. The place looked like a big roadside toy exposition, with toy makers giving demonstrations while selling their products.

I made it a point to visit this Janmashtami fair every year for the next 20 years. Every year the number of toy makers decreased, increasingly replaced by stalls selling cheap plastic toys. Last year I could count only

seven action toy makers. The loss is not only the artisans, but of thousands of children visiting the fair.

The toy mela I described is not unique to Ahmedabad. West Bengal and Orissa are 'treasure states' for toys. I visited over 50 fairs during a one year stay in West Bengal. I recollect a simple incident. While travelling in a bus, I saw a man walking with a bundle of jiggling puppets and acrobats. I jumped off the bus. Abbas was going to a one-day mela in the city. There were over 150 action toy makers with stalls on either side of the road. There was not a single plastic toy stall. The flutes, wind wheels, acrobats, drum carts, toy violins, rattles and other play-things were being sold by artisans. It had the air of an open air museum of toys. This was in 1977. Had I not noted this down, today it would be difficult to believe that such a great children's toy fair had taken place in the recent past. Thousands of people made their living from toys.

**F**estival toys are made by crafts communities as a seasonal activity. Many potters make icons and figurines for festivals and occasions like Janamashtmi and Ganesh Chaturthi. For a project related to the proposal for setting up a national centre for toys, I travelled all over India to meet craft communities engaged in toy making. This was in the early 1980s. I met crafts communities working with papier mache, bamboo, clay, terracotta, reeds, wood and soon. There were thousands of people engaged in this area of work. This too has declined.

Craft toys are made by communities specializing in toy making. During an all India survey in the late '70s and '80s, I found a number of well established craft groups exclusively involved in toy making. For instance, there was a large community of potters in Agra making thousands of

papier mache birds. Toy making communities located in Varanasi in U.P., Udaipur in Rajasthan, Channapatna in Karnataka and Idar in Gujarat made turned-wood lacquered toys by the millions. In Amritsar I came across groups of women artisans selling 'surkanda rattles'. This child-safe sculpture-like rattle was a popular toy for children. Even today the women folk of this community supplement their family income by making and selling this outstanding toy.

**B**ut what is the situation today? I revisited Varanasi and Udaipur after a gap of 15 years. Raw material now constitutes a major problem. No one listens to the crafts people. Toy makers have switched over to other areas of work. It is the same story everywhere – the usual tale of apathy and total unconcern for the promotion of indigenous toys and toymakers.

We then have the tiny things, mass produced toys by tiny industry. We often see hawkers carrying a range of tiny mass produced toys on a bamboo structure. The tiny puzzles, plastic whistles, balloons, are some of the common cheap toys mass produced by a tiny household industry. These are usually supplied against orders from wholesale shops. A few years ago we could have got a range of toys which were hand-made. But today it is only the cheap plastic moulded ones that are visible.

Finally, there is the upcoming market-driven toy manufacturing sector. The toys bought as birthday gifts are usually from this segment of industry. There are several medium scale industries engaged in this sector. From a modest Rs 1000 million annual turnover a decade ago, this sector has grown steadily in terms of its business turnover. Jokingly, I often ask my friends to get me one mass produced modern toy which is also indig-

enously designed and developed. I have yet to receive any such sample.

I am not opposed to the mass produced, mass marketed toys. But, at present, the products are expensive, with hardly any indigenous development. The designs are mere adoptions and imitations of popular western ones. The variety currently available has a limited play value. The modern toys produced by the organized sector of industry are often viewed as 'good but costly'. Lately many researchers and educationists are bringing out the 'other side' of these 'good looking toys.'

**A** major criticism of the mass marketed mono-cultural toys is that they offer limited scope for participation. Second, the toy industry is increasingly becoming a part of the entertainment and commodity industry. This shift has been clearly noticed in the methods adopted by commercially successful toys like the 'Barbie dolls'. Researchers have voiced their concern about the 'hidden agenda' behind the mass marketed 'advertising' or 'commodity' products. Children's emotions are being increasingly exploited. These toys are often status objects of ownership rather than play. There is also concern that many of them are in fact pseudo participative and only seem to promote the ego and greed.

Where are we headed to? It is tragic that our once great, vast, decentralized culture of toy making has been vastly eroded. Even 'educated' parents don't like to buy artisan-made toys, produced in 'slums' and 'dirty' homes. Many parents seem to consider self-made products, made of common discarded materials as 'junk'. In reality most modern toys are not only expensive but can be termed as junk as far as their play value is concerned. Second, the cultural value of

mono-cultural toys is questionable. If they are the first artifacts providing a socio-cultural context to young minds, then it is fair to ask what socio-cultural context is being promoted?

**T**he reasons behind the erosion and rapid decline of the culture of indigenous toys and toy makers are not difficult to discern. They are the same, for example, that are bringing about the steady, sickening and slow death of bio-diversity, our alternative health practices. Similar factors are behind our rivers becoming *naalas*, and our cities becoming high and low-level slums.

Today, grand allopathic hospitals are projected as the answer to people's health problems and cars as solutions for mass transportation needs. Why should mass produced, mass marketed, sleek toys then not be accepted as the 'best' tools of play? The problem is that the best is often associated with the imported, latest and faddist.

Often, parents ask how they should go about choosing toys. My advice is that expensive toys need not be the best things to play with. Judge a toy for play and participation rather than as a thing to possess. Focus on safety considerations and its child-friendliness. The thrill is provided by the concept of the toy.

If the spontaneous response of children is to be taken as reliable feedback, then toys made by children would be rated far higher. In my workshops for children and adults working with children, I can list numerous examples of joy and thrill, rarely associated with most of the modern commodity toys. Child-made toys have a profound and long lasting impact. They help children in creative use of their 3H: hands, heart and head.

For the younger ones, the experience of making toys is profound. For

older children, we often use a range of simple concepts to help them innovate and design new products. The response of children and adults is often surprising. It is not that mass produced, mass marketed, mono-cultural toys have no role but that it is a limited one. What we need is the co-existence of the old and new, traditional and modern. Both the indigenous and the mono-cultural toys have their own place and can co-exist.

But our present mindset seems to go for 'this or that', to choose the 'best', which often means choosing the imported, the latest and the faddist. Is it not ironical that while today there are more 'educated' parents, more child development departments and research centers, yet the quality of play material has deteriorated?

**W**hile the factory-made toy sector can take care of itself, the sectors of child-made and artisan-made indigenous toys need institutional support and promotion. We need to bring out the significance of these resources and relate them to genuine play and education. We need to promote diversity, decentralization, and democratization of our cultural resources. It would be difficult for hard-headed adults to realize that children too need a 'home grown foundation' for their play.

All said done, there is little to be gained by blaming the national or multinational toy companies. We have ourselves ruined our priceless heritage. Be it our toys, water resources or bio-diversity, there seems a design in the madness. But whose design is this and why are we not capable of doing something about it? While saving the rivers or salvaging the natural heritage may seem a massive task, beyond our individual capacity, the same cannot be said about supporting and promoting good play resources for children.

# Hunger

VEENA DAS

IN an impressive study on the impact of hunger on practices of child rearing in a small market town in Brazil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes<sup>1</sup> states the problem of child neglect in the following terms. 'I argue,' she says, 'that high expectancy of child death is a powerful shaper of maternal thinking and practice as evidenced, in particular, in delayed attachments to infants sometimes thought of as temporary "visitors".'

Questioning the commonly held notions of a universal mother love, Scheper-Hughes gives devastating descriptions of how mothers crazed with hunger find it difficult to harness material and emotional resources to ensure the survival of their children: babies viewed by their mothers as doomed to die because of their frailty are allowed to die. Her ethnography is designed to challenge our judgement of such mothers in terms of such facile notions as 'maternal neglect'.

Scheper-Hughes' contention that we need to produce a political

economy of emotion is well taken. There is a high expectancy of death, especially of children, in the town she studied. The ability to face death with equanimity and stoicism is highly valued. As an unintended consequence of these factors, patterns of nurturing are produced that lead to a differentiation within the infants between those who are thought of as 'thrivers' and 'keepers' and those who are thought of as born 'already wanting to die'.

In the thick ethnography that she has produced we come to see the life-world of mothers who can be so crazed by hunger that they view themselves in conflict with their babies for nourishment. Similarly, frequent pregnancies, highly unstable relations of conjugal or sexual solidarity find many mothers struggling alone with the task of ensuring the survival of their children.

In this paper I want to share some of my ethnographic experiences that center around children from families with very little food security, which in turn produces parental behaviour that may be interpreted as neglect if we do not see the totality of

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1. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping*. University of California Press, 1995.

circumstances in which it is produced. The examples are taken from poor households in the districts of Bilaspur and Sarguja in Madhya Pradesh. Studies by ICMR, based upon sampling procedures which have tried to measure moderate to severe malnutrition by methods of weekly recall, suggest that the extent of malnutrition among children from tribes classified as 'primitive' range from 30% to 45%. The infant mortality rate in Madhya Pradesh is 117 per thousand and in some tribal groups it has been found to be as high as 154 per thousand.

There have been several attempts at the macro level to explain the high incidence of infant mortality in the Hindi speaking states through evoking factors like the low level of literacy in these regions. There is, however, the direct impact of appalling poverty which makes it impossible for the family to ensure the survival of their children. This is much better captured by narrating the stories of such families rather than by any statistical overviews. One such story narrated here is by no means exceptional.

**T**he month was April '97. We had visited Tutpara, an important hamlet in a village in Sarguja, where prominent persons of the village had gathered to greet me. After talking to them I suggested to the sarpanch who was a young Oraon and another older person, also an Oraon, that we walk to the hamlets of the Pahadi Korvas which were situated at different heights in the nearby hills. We climbed up to Imlipara, a tiny hamlet of 10 related households, where we were first greeted by a tall man who completely dominated the small space on which some kind of temporary shelters had been built.

It was obvious that he was in an inebriated condition. He had come from a hamlet higher up on the hills to visit his daughter who was married

into this hamlet. A number of women (5 or 6) were sitting in a row outside one of the shelters. Children had gathered around and were staring from a distance. A little further away, under a tamarind tree (from which the hamlet derives its temporary name, for it is not counted as a separate hamlet in official records), sat a young mother (the intoxicated man's daughter) with a small baby in her lap who was suckling at her breasts. A couple of other men were standing around, but most of them were out. We were soon joined by a man who appeared to be the head of this hamlet. It was to his son that the first man's daughter was married.

**O**n inquiring about their sources of livelihood, the man who was intoxicated became aggressive. He said there was very little *patta* land (i.e. land over which they had title) that anyone owned, less than one acre per family. They had a little bit of *kabza* land (occupied land)—what they grew on it was so little, it was consumed within a month. 'What did they do for the rest of the year?' 'We do what we can do,' he said. 'What *banibhuti* we get, we do to fill our stomachs and if nothing is there we just drink water' (He gestures by putting a big glass to his mouth and swallowing it rapidly). Then he pointed to the young woman suckling her baby and said, 'Look, look there—that baby is burning with fever. Yesterday I walked all the way to a nearby town to get a pill. I spent whatever money I had earned in the town the day before and trudged back late at night, but the pill has made no difference.' I touched the baby's forehead. It was burning and he was suckling at the breast desperately but the mother did not seem to have much milk.

I asked the mother if she had eaten anything. She mistook my question and thought I was asking if the

baby had eaten something. Her father turned aggressive and said, 'What should we give him to eat—such a little thing—should we give him so much rice (gestured with his hands to indicate a large quantity)—how can he eat that?' 'No, no', I said, 'has the mother had anything to eat?' Now the others joined the conversation and said that they were waiting for some of the men to return. Whatever they got, rice or *kodo* or *kudki*—they would cook it with some tamarind. I asked if they knew about ORS (*jeevanghol*). They knew nothing about it. Evidently the ANM (auxiliary nurse midwife) never came up to the hamlet. It seemed that it was only during the polio eradication programme that they were all made to go to the school in the main hamlet with the babies who were given the drops.

**T**he sarpanch got quite defensive. He said that if these people did not come down, if they did not tell what troubled them, how could we help them? I tried to explain an alternate way of making the oral rehydration fluid. 'Were they going to make *pej*' (a thin rice gruel)? 'No, by the time the men come back there will be time only for one meal and they will make either rice or *kodo*' (a coarse cereal grown in the region with little nutritional value). I asked the sarpanch to explain to the young mother and the older woman sitting next to her how important it was for the baby to receive fluids. In his dialect, he began to explain. 'You have some salt in the house, don't you? Well take this much sugar, put it in this much water and boil it and then put a pinch of salt in it and squeeze a few drops of lemon. 'No sugar in the house?' Yes, but go down to someone—they may not give you sugar if it is for yourself, but if you say that it is needed to save the child they will give you a fistful.'

The women nodded. 'Where will you get the water from?' I asked. Now a new problem arose, for the hand pump was not working. They were all drinking water from a nearby stream. The sarpanch told the baby's grandfather that the water must be boiled and cooled. I was beginning to realise the hopelessness of the situation. No sugar, no source of clean drinking water, shortage of fuel. But the man who was inebriated again became aggressive. 'Whatever you say, we will not go to anyone's door to beg.' The women were listening more intently and I thought they intended to follow it up. 'But do not just feed it to him all at once,' I said. 'Give it in small sips.' (How shall I demonstrate that?) The woman took a leaf, folded it in the shape of a spoon and said, 'like this?' The sarpanch promised to help by getting a packet of ORS.

I then walked to a very old woman (a classificatory grandmother of the baby's father) who was sitting nearby and deseeding the tamarind fruit that she had been able to shake down from the tree with the help of a stick. 'What is your name, amma?' 'Mo nam, mon nam hai Budhbai - My name, my name is Budh Bai.' 'Who all are in the house (meaning how many members are there)?' She laughed loudly and said, 'mo aur mor gharmua.' There is exquisite irony in her usage for she had wittily substituted *gharwala*, the term for husband, one who is of the house, by *gharmua*, a mild curse meaning the death of the house, that could also express affection.

I learnt that she was too old and weak to labour. She sits under the tree gathering the tamarind fruit and then takes it down to the village and sells it at Rs 1 or 2 a kilo. Or she gets some coarse grain in exchange and that is what she has to eat. She confides that

she had not eaten anything today but had consumed some *mahuwa* liquor. 'Consider it my medicine,' she says, and laughs her head off. The official who was with me shook his head in disbelief. 'Nothing to eat,' he said, 'and still they will drink.' To me her drunken laughter had a different meaning altogether. In Nancy Scheper-Hughes' field they would have named it 'fool the hunger food.'

In this case, as in many others I encountered, no one just gives up on babies (though they often give up on old people). The macro factors in the region, however, make it difficult for families, especially for those of the Pahadi Korvas who have little land, to ensure that babies, young mothers and very old people get enough to eat. The terrain is hilly. There are no markets nearby. Work is not readily available. Since the economy is a single crop rain-fed one, demand for agricultural labour is limited. So the sight of women waiting for the men to come back with small amounts of rice or kodo-kudki is a common one.

In discussions with the local officials, such as the block development officers or project officers or medical officers, blame is often shifted to the tribal families for their poverty. The *adivasis* are like animals, an official told me, because they have no ambition to do better. Whatever *chara pani* (fodder) you put before them, they will eat and be satisfied. The *adivasis* think differently. In this case, the baby's grandfather had walked at least 20 kilometers through rough terrain to get to a 'doctor' in the nearest small town with the days wages he had just earned. The doctor took Rs 20 for what was probably an aspirin and sent him back with the *goli*. Although the district administration has an ambitious programme to make ordinary medicines available,

not only in the PHCs but in every *hat*; the poor still go to private practitioners who are little more than quacks. They end up paying large amounts relative to their incomes for useless drugs and injections. It is under such conditions that parents are often unable to save small babies and infants. The high infant mortality rate is indicative of a whole gamut of problems that families face in their struggle for survival.

The theme of *mahuwa* as medicine was to appear in many other contexts. In Batidanda, set up as a model village to demonstrate how the Pahadi Korvas had been successfully weaned away from a nomadic lifestyle to one of settled agriculture, I indeed found that the villagers of the main hamlet had successfully grown the *rabi* crop of wheat. In the houses I found that there was some stored grain, small fish, and vegetables grown in the household *badi*. Under a WHO sponsored scheme the hamlet had been provided with a bathroom for women, a public pump for water, *gobar* gas, and a few stone benches.

But just a little distance away from the 'model' hamlet was another in which lived some *adivasi* and some non-*adivasi* families, both equally poor. Since this was not part of the model hamlet, none of the benefits had reached them. The head of a Pahadi Korva family showed me several kinds of roots and leaves. The roots had exotic names such as *tejraj* (king of the luminous ones), *bhojraj* (one with a royal taste) and the leaves had a sour taste and could be ground into a chutney. In this hamlet the land owned by families was too small to be measured in acres - instead the measure was in terms of the number of fistfuls (*mutthis*) of seed that could be scattered on the land. In this slack season there was no stored grain in the

house. It was a question of managing some bit of rice or kodo-kudki every day. There was a jackfruit tree in the compound owned by one of the families, but basically the households foraged for work or went surreptitiously to the forest to steal wood which could be sold.

Before they came down from the hills to settle in this village, did they have enough to eat in the forest, I asked. They had practiced shifting cultivation in the forest up in the hills, they said, but there were many months of hunger. Our ancestors had planted these roots which have great power, the head of the Pahadi Korva household told me. What can we do? They do not fill the stomachs of our children, but when they become weak we feed them bits of roots so that the power of the ancestors can get into them. We also feed them mahuwa, very small amounts, because it acts as a medicine against hunger.

In the district where I travelled for a month, from village to village, and held many discussions with the children (and with adults) on food and hunger, one fact stood out. Whenever I asked the children what their favourite food was, I received the response – *khana* (food). Initially I would smile, thinking I had been unable to communicate my question. As my data on food practices accumulated, I found that out of 93 families I had interviewed in detail on food practices, only five reported that they could have three meals a day. No one had time to cook in the morning, so food consisted of *basi* (left-overs of the previous night's meal). Even this was not something all families could afford. 20 families out of 93 reported that they had *chaha*, tea without milk or sugar. In the afternoon they cooked *pej*, a thin rice gruel often eaten with leaves ground into a paste. Only at

night was a cooked meal of rice and some vegetable possible. It was rare not to be hungry. In this context, the favourite food of children simply referred to a cooked meal – *khana*. Hence the high point of school was *madhyannha*, the mid-day meal. The two to four year olds when asked what they did in the *anganwadi*, had a one word response – *daliya*.

Let me narrate one last example. Looking through the records of a PHC, I found that against the column on newborns, the ANM was required to fill in a column that asked her to put a tick mark against the choice – was the baby normal or weak (*kamzor*)? In the records, not a single baby was reported as having been born weak. I asked the female supervisor if there were any weak babies she had seen. She assured me that all births had been normal. Were the babies weighed on birth, I asked. No, she said, till recently they had not been issued weighing kits. So they filled that column on the basis of their experience. Just at that time a mother brought a three month old baby for treatment of a skin disorder. The baby was clearly underweight and listless. I asked the supervisor if that baby appeared normal to her. 'Now that you ask,' she said, 'the baby is perhaps weak, but then all babies are born weak here. Where is the food for the mothers to eat?'

And finally a comment by an eight year old on being asked: 'What have you eaten this morning, roti, chaha, basi?' 'Roti? – I have not even seen the visage of a roti – *roti ki to shakal bhi nahin dekhi*.'

In describing the illnesses of children, no mother referred to a child who was no more as one who had died. Instead, they would say '*vo to kharab ho gaya* – the child is spoilt,' much as one would talk of a flower or a fruit that had dried up.



# Listening to children

PRITI JOSHI

I WAS interested in documenting experiences of young children in school in the context of how they view themselves and others. I wanted to hear what they said about themselves and other children and get an opportunity to discover the meaning of identity and relationships from the children's perspective. In this process, children could be represented as individuals with unique identities rather than as a group which is assumed to be largely homogeneous. When we think of children as a group, it becomes impossible to understand individuals and the dynamics of their relationships. Focusing on heterogeneity also broadens our understanding of children who have been categorized as disabled and we can begin to see beyond their labels.

My work has been influenced by the theoretical frameworks of phenomenology (Husserl, 1962), symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). In the context of children a phenomenological approach involves rejecting the preconceptions about children and their lives held by adults. Symbolic interactionism directs attention to the meaning of interaction to the participants themselves. This meaning may be different for children as well as

adults who are part of an interaction. Ethnomethodology focuses on practices of its members, with details of children's routines and practices in their everyday life. My emphasis was on listening to voices of children without urging them to speak, or asking adults what children mean, or suggesting answers when they were silent.

I spent time with children when they were in the classroom, at play or participating in activities like dancing, singing, clay modelling or reading in the library. During this period I learnt the importance of getting involved in children's practices and to wait, watch and listen without interrupting the flow of their activities. At times I chose themes which recurred in their conversations in an effort to discern how children gave meaning to them.

On my first day at school, I was introduced to 54 children who were addressed by a teacher as Class IV! This group identity was dominant in this setting. When encountering individual children outside the class, in corridors or play-ground, all adults wanted to know was their class and the name of the class teacher.

The interest shown in a child as distinct from the group related primarily to the child's academic performance. By this criteria only those

children who either performed very well or very poorly in their studies were recognized and identified. The rest were lost in the group. The only other children that the school system recognized were the 'troublemakers'.

**N**amita was a much talked about child of Class IV, a silent 'troublemaker' – a child who did not work or interact with others. In fact, no one had really heard her voice.

Smriti, Rhea, Meetu, Abha and Varsha were her classmates who sat near her. This is what they had to say: Smriti: Namita! Say 'Good morning' to Priti Ma'am.

Varsha: Not Ma'am, 'Didi'. She is not our teacher.

Smriti: Say, 'Good Morning' (Namita now smiles and looks at me guardedly).

Abha: Didi, she does not talk to everyone.

Rhea: She talks. I have heard her speak. In Hindi class when I asked her to read, she said, 'I don't know' (Namita poked a finger in her stomach and nodded and smiled as if agreeing with her).

Meetu: When she comes with a Didi in the morning she talks to her.

Rhea: And on the next day she came from behind and put her hand on my shoulder and said, 'Rhea!'

Meetu: Her voice is very husky. (She imitates Namita and the others laugh. So does Namita and hides her face.)

As I was drawn more closely into their social lives, children began to emphasize aspects of Namita's relationship with me.

Varsha: Didi, Namita was angry with you yesterday. Why didn't you come?

Abha: Now you stay with her here, in the class. We are going out to play.

Yesterday she sat alone when you didn't come.

Varsha: You give her paper to draw. Have you got colours today?

Abha: Ma'am saw her drawing yesterday. She said 'good!' Namita was very happy!

Namita's relationship with other children is illustrated by the following conversation. It highlights the control that she exercised over other children as also her ability to negotiate an advantageous position for herself.

Namita flashes a fist-sized deer which is actually an eraser and smiles invitingly at Aditi.

Aditi: Show!

Namita hands it to her. Other children gather around them, each wanting to feel and use it. Namita does not let them do so till they ask her. Aditi acts as the mediator who performs the act of giving and taking back of the object.

Then Namita takes out another object – a large, brightly coloured pencil sharpener. Children examine it and Namita allows one girl to take it home. Other children want this privilege too. Aditi opens a notebook and prepares a schedule listing out each child's turn, day-wise.

Aditi: Shall I give it to him Namita?

Namita gives her approval for all the children but she decides the day on which each child can take the sharpener home by indicating on paper the order in which Aditi has been listing out names of children.

**A**ccording to one teacher, children in Namita's class were given duties to look after her, like helping her to the toilet or taking out things from her bag. This had become quite a task for the girls. Namita did not get up to greet teachers nor did she obey simple instructions about class work, added another.

However, while paying close attention to Namita's interpersonal relations with the girls in her class, their talk about her and with her, it became clear that she was a different

person in their context. The teachers' perception about her did not ring true in this setting. The children were aware of how Namita appeared to others and this issue figured in their conversation and was questioned by them. Smriti says to Abha:

Smriti: She definitely cannot learn to sing if she does not speak. Mental... so boys call her 'mental'. But she is like us. Origami... she can go for origami.

I asked: Do girls also call her 'mental'?

Smriti: Never! She doesn't speak in school. She only talks like this (imitates Namita). With her mother she talks by 'speaking'. One day Namita told her mother that she was Smriti and would stay with me (Smriti says delightedly).

**I** noticed a difference in the teachers' interaction with Namita. They focused obsessively on what she could not or does not do. With them, her interaction tended to become confrontational, particularly when they insisted that she greet them or express herself verbally. She obeyed these commands with complete silence which was 'read' as extreme stubbornness. Additionally, in her interactions with adults she was expected to show evidence of having learnt something from them. This mode of interaction was limited to one of the adult teaching the child.

In her social relations with children, it was important for them to communicate with each other. Namita did so on her own terms, as did other children. Her refusal to speak, poor academic performance and 'behaviour problems' did not feature as significant aspects of her identity in her relation with most children in the class. Instead, it was her generosity and gentleness that seemed important to the children. With them she

appeared confident as the activities and interactions proceeded in ways that built up her strengths.

Another conversation with children made me re-think the situation when with friends Namita was allowed to feel differently and how she acquired this identity. Children who were close to her spontaneously changed their ways as they were interested in her, not in her ability to accomplish a particular task which was a crucial aspect of adult-child relationship in school.

**A**s this emphasis made her appear like a troublemaker, the expectation was for her to change. With children there was no such demand. In fact, children expected others to behave differently as well so that Namita could continue to assume a positive identity without being challenged or having to constantly prove herself.

The children were drawing. Arti talks to Manu and me.

Manu: Have you drawn this? (Namita smiles agreeing with Manu.)

Arti: Yes she has, haven't you Namita! What a lovely picture. (Namita is delighted.)

I: Wasn't Ritu drawing for her?

Manu: (sounds puzzled) Ritu has drawn for her?

Arti looked at me, signals that I should keep quiet and under her breath says, Arti: Didi, don't say that please, she will cry. She can do it, it is true. Yes! Yes!

So what was the criterion on which children based their decision to exclude a child from their activities? Bani, Ritu, Manu and Ankit spoke to me about some other children in their class. In the course of this exchange they mentioned 'bad kids' several times. So I tried to explore what this term meant to them.

Bani: Veenu opened Ma'am's register and told everyone her age. And

gave Ma'am a birthday card and wrote 'Dear Ma'am.' Is Ma'am her friend? I wrote 'Respected Ma'am.' She has no respect.

Veenu: You liar!

Manu, Ankit: You wrote that!

Veenu: Shut up!

Everyone: See, how she talks.

Manu: She also says that I will break your arm and give it in your hand.

Veenu: Just shut up!

Manu: If only you learn manners you will be a good kid.

Bani: Thank god, she will be absent tomorrow.

Ankit: Only bad kids talk to her.

I: Bad kids?

Ankit: Like Arun, Meetu, Hari....

Only they sit with each other. See, if I sit with a bad child I will learn a bad thing from him and next day another child will sit with me and learn a bad thing and bad children will multiply.

Manu: Didi, listen, Arun said to Ankit that his family is mad! No manners.

Bani: Meetu has no manners. She got C grade in discipline.

Manu: You know she told Veenu that there was a worm in her noodles.

Veenu gave her lunch box to her and Meetu ate up her food.

Ritu: But Didi, Mayur in our class is really bad. He told me not to drink water from the tap because a 'mental' has water from there.

Bani: He is a bad kid, he names other children... when he dropped an ink bottle he named Rakesh. He sang a dirty song too: Leaves don't shed, winds shed them; Boys are not mad, girls madden them.

Ritu: At least he doesn't hit like others. Vikas goes around hitting everyone.

Manu: Vikas is rude. He burst paper crackers even when Ma'am requested him not to. She did not shout, just told him not to, but he still did it. Didi he is... there he is... Ma'am will tell his father, 'you take him away. I have had enough.'

Ankit: He said, 'Don't hold Geetu's hand, she is mental.' Didi, her legs shake when she tries to play, she gets nervous(?). She said to Ritu, 'I feel lonely.' She is nice. She can't run and doesn't answer questions. He is proud, he is the class monitor. I said 'Keep quiet' to some children in our class and he said you can't say that. Why can't I? I am only asking children to be quiet. He is proud. No one makes friends with him.

**O**ne aspect of my work related to the dilemma I faced because of my involvement and close interaction with children. This confusion centred around my role in their setting. I was affected by what happened to and with them and in such situations doubted myself and my actions or lack thereof. When children were harshly scolded or beaten I wondered what I should do. Or when a teacher shouted at children to scare them into silence. Was it that I had been posted there to watch and report their misdeeds? I could not clarify my role to the children. It would have meant proving their teacher wrong.

The voices of children ring in my ears and I often catch myself repeating their conversations in my head. In going over what they say I find they had two requests which I could fulfill only rarely. My conversation with Abha and Mayank points to this.

Abha: Didi, don't go now. Go in the 7th period. Sixth period is free. We will chat.

I: I have to reach college soon.

Abha: You stay for the whole day tomorrow. You can tape in the library, it will not be noisy.

I: Tomorrow I will. Can you talk in the library with me? Won't the librarian be upset.

Abha: She won't come to know.

Mayank: Promise, you will sit on this side tomorrow.

I: Promise. Tell me what happens if I sit near your seat?

Mayank: Something... something happens.

I felt disturbed to leave in this manner as only I determined when it was time for me to go. The children did not control the situation as much as I did. I tried to keep the promises I made to them. I also shared my experiences with them of the times when I was absent or recounted those events which connected the end of one visit to the beginning of another. Relating an experience that could be shared made leave-taking easier for me.

Being with children with whom I was closely involved and reflecting on the process of inquiry made me conscious of situations when adults question children to check if they know the 'right' answer which the adult already knows. Or they amuse themselves or feign interest in children only in order to appear 'interested' to their parents or other adults. This limits our comprehension about children as we fail to understand how they actually define their experiences. We rarely consider the fact that children too have experiences which we may not have had. We believe that being older we are 'more experienced' to judge the validity, meaningfulness and adequacy of children's experiences.

Can we not reconsider the frame of reference on which adult-child interactions are based? A shift can come about if we do not deny children their perspectives:

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# The politics of child care

VANDANA PRASAD

HISTORICALLY, child care in all its dimensions has been considered the domain of the mother or, at best, the family. However, in the last few decades, the issue has increasingly made its presence felt as one that is fundamentally related to, and with wide implications for, society as a whole. Simultaneously, there has been a growing impatience with the fact that the state has largely failed in its responsibility towards the child.

Nobody can deny that children are important and need looking after. Why is it that the issue of child care, urgent and critical to those of us working with children, continues to be a victim of ignorance, laxity and neglect?

The reasons are manifold and complex. Children across cultures or class are the most invisible section of society. Considered voiceless, they entirely depend upon adults to present their case. Their non-participation in the 'vote bank' denies them space in the political agenda and even the well-intentioned, including their parents, do not fully understand or acknowledge their needs, rights, or even the fact that they have rights at all. What is not adequately acknowledged is that for children to avail of their right to childhood, demands informed and caring adults and, of course, resources.

The absence of a well informed, fully sensitized and effective lobby is further compounded by the fact that the problems of children are inextricably linked to the entire gamut of the

social and political ailments of the country of which they are the 'ultimate victims'. And within this stratification, the girl child forms the lowest rung.

There is little doubt that the gap between rich and poor has only increased over the years. The poor have also increased in numbers. Where 33% families existed below the poverty line in 1987-88, that number has now increased to almost 50%.<sup>1</sup> Increasing unemployment within the organized sector has led to a simultaneous increase in women (and children) joining the workforce as casual labour in fields, factories, on construction sites, as domestic workers or as home-based workers on contract. They are paid less and are easier to exploit. Many more families now solely depend for their very existence upon such women, who often travel vast distances to earn a none too certain daily wage, coming back to cook, clean and prepare for another day.

Entire families migrate in search of work and wages, losing out on traditional support systems, particularly those relating to child care. It is not difficult to imagine where the young child fits into this scenario. Crying atop a heap of rubble or left at home in the care of a slightly older child, the situation is hardly one that nurtures survival, growth or development.

The facts of a woman's life are such that she manages, at great but unacknowledged cost, to combine all this with child bearing and rearing for the large part of her life. In situations of paucity, the last to be considered are women and children, particularly the girl child. The cyclic effect of this deprivation, both real and relative, is devastating. Undernourished, sick girls

become mothers and produce low birth weight sickly babies handicapped from birth. The fact that one third of the babies born in India are underweight is a telling comment on the status of the entire female race in the country.

To look at women or children in isolation is to look at only half the picture, and to plan for one without the other, as has been the case so far, is to leave plans quite incomplete. For instance, no income generation or adult literacy scheme can be considered well-formulated without provisions for child care to allow women to participate. No scheme that intends to improve the lot of the child can afford to exclude her family, community and environment. In particular, it must target the girl child and the pregnant woman to break the vicious cycle of poverty breeding poverty.

Today, there is a growing awareness of the importance of early childhood care and development (ECCD) as a worthwhile investment, even in terms of resource management alone. What could be more logical than trying to prevent or 'manage' the problems children, 'future adults', are likely to face from the start of life itself, rather than intervening at a later stage?

That there is a need for state intervention in the eradication or even alleviation of poverty would not need discussion if political manifestos were anything to go by. Significantly, most of these, like the minimum needs programme, leave out child care facilities as a basic requirement without which many of the other 'needs' are impossible to meet, specially those of elementary and adult education. This highlights the lack of political awareness, or will, regarding the rights of children and their importance for society.

In the present scenario wherein families are unable to provide adequate child care, and children are in no position to partake of these programmes directly as individuals, a vehicle must be created to reach them. What is needed are arrangements for child care—from providing creches at work sites where a working woman can breast feed, pre-school facilities for the child of 3-6 years, to empowering the woman at home to look after a baby better through supporting her stay at home and promoting informal neighbourhood child care arrangements, including for her older children. The pre-school and day care centres, if well run, can promote good health; nutrition, growth and development for the child, prepare her for school, and prevent the child from being placed in situations of abuse. The advantages to the woman are obvious.

Unfortunately none of these arguments have resulted in effective measures to tackle what is a crisis requiring immediate and committed action. To quote a few alarming facts and figures: 15 crore women living below the poverty line constitute our female workforce. More than 90% of these women work in the unorganized sector.<sup>2</sup> 16% of the rural population earns less than Rs 3 per day, and another 18% less than Rs 5.<sup>3</sup> 60 million children under six years belong to a group whose mothers have to work for their survival. Of these only 18.5 million are covered under government schemes.

A paltry 360,000 benefit from government and statutory creche services.<sup>4</sup> A total of 14,313 creches are

2. Forum for Creche and Childcare Services (FORCES).

3. NCAER study of 33,000 rural households, 1994.

4. Department of Women and Child Development, 1994-95.

1. *The Times of India*, 4 February 1996.

being presently run by the government.<sup>5</sup> Even these tend to convert to *balwadis* as they cannot cope with babies under two years for lack of required manpower and facilities. The rest are largely taken care of by older siblings (5-14 years), often girls, who then remain out of school.

Female literacy is at a poor 38% as compared to male literacy at 66%.<sup>6</sup> India has the world's largest percentage of malnourished children at 53% of total under fives, exceeding even Sub Saharan countries at 31%.<sup>7</sup> India has the largest child workforce in the world at 45 million.<sup>8</sup> 50% of children in the age group 5-15 years do not go to school.<sup>9</sup> Childhood mortality rates as indicators of child care present a depressing picture.<sup>10</sup>

**T**he Maternal Mortality Rate indicates that 570 women out of every 100,000 die due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth as compared to 140 in Sri Lanka and 13 in industrialized nations. The prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women is 88%.<sup>11</sup>

There is no denying that the state has promised to address the problems of child care and that there are no simple solutions. However, even today, there is a tendency to hold back from specific measures that could translate concern into action. Our policies are characterized by 'vagueness' and lack of detail and treat various

manifestations of inadequate child care in a patchy manner rather than comprehensively attacking root causes.

When translated into programmes, they remain similarly vague, short-sighted, patchy, and the resource allocation is invariably insufficient to cover even the provisions made, whereas the need is for a nationwide comprehensive and integrated campaign that focuses

on prevention, uses a multi-pronged approach, with sufficient resources to allow for success.

For instance, the Directive Principles of State Policy guarantee the right to education and the protection of the child. Article 24 promises prohibition of employment of children in factories, Article 42 maternity relief, and Article 45 free and compulsory education for children below the age of 14 years. Of course, the child is privy to all the fundamental rights accorded to all citizens by the Constitution.

**A** major policy step was the National Policy For Children (1974) as an attempt to follow up on the Directive Principles and the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959. It reaffirmed the importance of children as a 'supremely important asset' and aimed for 'equal opportunities for development to all children.' It also stated that to achieve the above aim, 'the state will provide necessary legislative and administrative support within a reasonable time,' a statement now 23 years old.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, and to which India

TABLE 1

Country	U5MR Average annual reduction (%)			IMR
	1995	1980-95	1995-2000*	
Sri Lanka	19	6.7	4.3	15
Nepal	114	3.0	9.8	81
India	115	2.9	9.9	76
Bangladesh	115	4.0	9.9	85
Pakistan	137	0.6	13.4	95
Bhutan	189	1.8	19.9	122
Afghanistan	257	0.6	26.0	165
South Asia region	121	2.6	11.1	82
Industrialized nations	8	3.6	5.7	7

Countries arranged in order of increasing U5MR

\* Required reduction rate to achieve the stated targets of IMR under 60, U5MR under 70.

U5MR: Under 5 Mortality Rates, IMR: Infant Mortality Rates

acceded in 1992, expanded the concept of child care to cover the rights of the child to survival, development, protection and participation; and enjoined its signatories to bring their legislation in line with the provisions of the convention. India also signed the World Declaration for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action (September 1990).

**T**o this end, in 1992 a National Plan of Action was formulated by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of HRD, in conjunction with NGOs and social activists. This set out targets, objectives and programmes for achieving these in the sectors of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, children in especially difficult circumstances, girl child, adolescent girls, children and the environment, women and advocacy, and people's participation.

1994 saw yet another national consultation organized jointly by the Indian Council of Child Welfare, UNICEF and the Department of Women and Child Development to determine the extent to which the rights of the child had become a real-

5. Annual Report Part IV, 1996-97, Department of Women and Child Development.

6. State of the World's Children, 1997, UNICEF.

7. Human Development Report, UNDP, 1997.

8. State of The World's Children, 1997, UNICEF.

9. State of The World's Children, 1997, UNICEF.

10. State of the World's Children, 1997, UNICEF. Compiled by S. Ramji, *Indian Pediatrics*, Vol 34, May 1997.

11. National draft population policy.

ity following India's ratification of the CRC. However, the final report of this consultation is not yet available.

Day care services, central to the implementation of the CRC for the young child and derived legally from Article 45 of the Constitution, did not receive a formal reference in policy till the New Education Policy of 1986. Subsequently, the Shram Shakti Report (1988) and the Ramamurthy Commission Report (1990) identified day care services as crucial to the empowerment of women and children, specifically the girl child, and spelled out strategies in this regard. These were finally incorporated in the Plan of Action of the NEP in 1992.

**A**part from problems of inadequate definition, some policies have by their rhetoric created a conceptual environment of helplessness and acceptance that has been far more inimical to real change. The above mentioned NEP is a perfect example. Its basic assumption, highly debatable in the light of widespread NGO experience since, was that income from child labour is what kept the home fires burning. This led to the reinforcement of non formal education as a major thrust area for the population that 'cannot' be enrolled into local schools. It also accepted child labour as a 'harsh reality' without confronting its root causes (poverty, adult unemployment, unavailability of relevant primary education and so on). Ten years later, the struggle against child labour continues and free and compulsory primary education for all children remains a dream.

Apart from the provisions of the directive principles and the fundamental rights as laid down in the constitution, some industrial acts (The Factories Act, The Plantations Act, The Mines Act, and The Interstate Migrant Workers Act) provide for day

care services at the workplace. However, these cover only a few sectors of organized labour. This has often led to a backlash creating discrimination against the employment of women.

The ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services Scheme) is the main state run programme for child care. Started in 1975, this scheme has remained the prime vehicle for reproductive and child development services for women in the reproductive age group and children under six. It aims at improving nutritional and health status, thereby reducing malnutrition, morbidity and mortality, laying the foundations of healthy all round development of children, and providing health and child care education to their mothers. However, there are many implementation difficulties that are intrinsic to the structure of the scheme. Day care has not even been mentioned as one of the functions of the scheme, though some *anganwadis* in a few states have started to provide day care, funded by the National Creche Fund.

**M**oreover, the entire three hour programme, including extension work in the community, hinges upon a single *anganwadi* worker who is paid an 'honorarium' of Rs 400 (recently increased to about Rs 500 after country-wide agitations for a raise). Though the scheme is meant to impact children from birth to 2+ (a period considered crucial to growth and development) through providing immunisation and nutritional support, coverage remains limited because full day care services are not provided and the working mother is never available during the centres working hours. The scheme is therefore primarily accessed by older children who can make their own way to the centre and back, younger children remaining largely untouched. Nevertheless, it

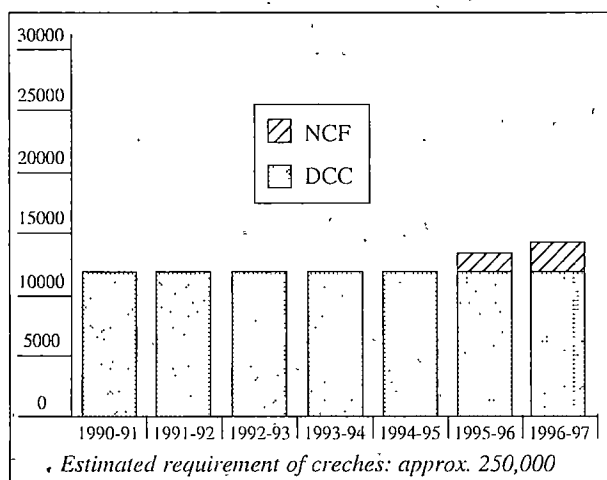
did provide a conceptual framework for integrated mother and child care services and partially fulfilled its mandate to the population reached, with maximal impact on immunisation.

**T**he ICDS reaches out to 3.7 million expectant and nursing mothers and 18.6 million children under 6 years. Of these, 10.8 million (3-6 years) participate in centre based pre school activities.<sup>12</sup> It was expanded during the eighth five year plan and now stands sanctioned in all 5320 development blocks of the country, besides 310 urban slums. However, considering that this is practically the only scheme existing for mother and child services, and soaks up the lion's share of the budget for the same (Rs 682 crore out of the total Rs 847 crore allocated to the Department of Women and Child Development, 1996-97), no attempt has been made to simultaneously resolve the problems listed above.

Creches/day care centres for children of working /ailing mothers: This scheme is being implemented through the Central Social Welfare Board, Bhartiya Adim Jati Sewak Sangh and the Indian Council for Child Welfare cumulatively running 12470 creches. The number of creches under this scheme has remained the same since 1990, catering to only about 3 million children, though the requirement is about 20 times greater. Unfortunately these creches cater largely to the 3-6 years old child, given inadequate staff, money, time and facilities.

National Creche Fund: Set up during 1993-94 largely as a response to concerted pressure by the growing child care lobby, including the 47 member organisation networks Forum for Creches and Child care Services (FORCES), this gives assistance to voluntary organisations to set up

12. Annual Report 1996-97. Department of Women and Child Development.



creches. It runs on the interest from a corpus fund of Rs 19.9 crore (though a Rs 100 crore budget is estimated to meet creche requirements for underprivileged children!) and is currently supporting 1843 creches.

**E**arly Childhood Education Scheme: Started in 1982, this scheme was designed to prepare children of the age group 3-6 years for school entry. Currently 4365 ECE centres are being run by voluntary organisations in nine educationally backward states. Financial assistance to each centre amounts to Rs 7980 per annum, which includes an honorarium for one teacher. This scheme is to be phased out with the universalisation of the ICDS.

Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA): This scheme, introduced in 1982 to provide focus to the already existing Integrated Rural Development Programme, aims to enhance women's earnings by encouraging selfemployment. It has now been extended to all districts. Community Based Convergent Services (CBCS) were added as a component in 1991 to provide an umbrella for all the various schemes and programmes that benefit rural women and children. Child care activities were incorporated during 1995-96 to provide day care, literacy

for women, fill in critical gaps in immunisation, nutrition and so on, to provide assistance and facilities to the physically handicapped, and immediate relief and legal assistance in cases of physical abuse of the girl child. Of all the current schemes operating for women and children this 'new'

DWCRA seems the most progressive in terms of the stated mandate of the scheme.

Urban Basic Services Programme: The urban poor account for 80 million of our population<sup>13</sup> of which 65% are women and children. This group is characterized by widespread migration to and from rural areas and is subject to the most abject living conditions. The UBSP was started during the seventh five year plan to alleviate urban poverty by a process of community participation and convergence of schemes and programmes, and identified women and children as a key target group. Though balwadis have been organized by community participation, creches are conspicuous by their absence.

**N**utrition and health programmes: The major ones are the child survival and safe motherhood programme consisting of universal immunisation, Vitamin A prophylaxis, diarrhoeal diseases control, programme for control of acute respiratory infections, and safe motherhood initiatives for the six high MMR states. Nutrition related programmes include special nutrition programme, the balwadi, midday meal, ICDS, Iodine deficiency disorders control, and prophylaxis against

13. 1991 Census.

nutritional anaemia. The National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) gives a lump sum of Rs 300 each for the first two live births of a woman over 19 years who is below the poverty line. Obviously, this scheme is short-sighted and inadequate.

**S**uccessive five year plans have reaffirmed an increasing commitment to the Indian child. The ninth five year plan acknowledges that growth during the last five years has not benefited the poor and the underprivileged. It also prioritises schemes that benefit women and children. A greater integration of DWCRA with IRDP and TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment) is to be attempted to provide women's groups with greater access to financial resources and training. Apart from meeting targets for mother and child health, the plan promises to provide 'need based, client centered, demand driven high quality, integrated reproductive and child health care.' The ICDS is to be universalised, with priority to the child below two years. Mini anganwadis have been envisaged to cover remote pockets inhabited by scheduled tribes and primitive tribal groups. Supplementary feeding programmes are to be universalised with a special package for the girl child and children between 6 and 23 months.

The existing National Policy for Children is to be suitably reviewed in the context of the CRC. Child care through day care does not find a specific place in the ninth plan, either as a strategy for empowering women or as a means of implementing the focus on the child below two years. Nor does the plan suggest universalising, or even extending the limited creche component of the ICDS. In other words, though providing hope in terms of a favourable direction, it stops short of making a firm commit-



ment, as has been the precedent with other policy statements.

No policy is implementable without adequate resources and these are not likely to be allocated for activities not specifically mentioned within a programme. These dual problems have already been highlighted in the preceding sections of this article. The relative lack of resources for the ICDS, the national creche fund, the ECE programme, only serve to prove the relatively low priority set for child care, even though investing in child care offers benefits other than programme efficacy and efficiency. Unfortunately, this kind of far sightedness is rarely reflected in the country's budgets, the current one being no exception.

**T**he current budget expenditure is estimated at Rs 232,176 crore of which 2.5% (Rs 6025 crore) has been allocated to schemes for the poor i.e., an allocation of 2.5% for 40% of the population. Rs 330 crore has been set aside for slum development – not even sufficient for the development of slums in one major city!<sup>14</sup> In comparison, the defence budget is Rs 35,620 crore. Also, almost half the savings under central plan spending in the previous year have been as a result of cut-backs in crucial areas of welfare, such as the 40% (Rs 600 crore) cut-back in the budgeted expenditure on the mid-day meal scheme and the Rs 460 crore cutback in rural employment and other development schemes.<sup>15</sup>

In the period 1996-97, the total expenditure of the central government was Rs 87086.2 crore, of which education received 3.9%, health 0.9%, and family welfare 1.8% as compared to 11.7% for defense.<sup>16</sup> Development

expenditure in terms of percentage of GDP has declined from 12.5% in 1985-86 to 7.7% in 1996-97, indicating the withdrawal of the state from the sector which is at complete variance with the objectives outlined in our policy statements.<sup>17</sup>

It is estimated that the resources for closing the poverty gap and eliminating extreme poverty amount to about 4% of the national income. Therefore, it is largely a myth that government cannot afford to guarantee basic positive rights, specially adequate nutrition, primary health care and basic education for all children.<sup>18</sup> It has also been computed that as little as Rs 5 per child per day can ensure full and good quality day care. This would imply barely 1% of the GNP to cover 60 million children.

Only recently, the United Front government promised 6% of the GNP for education by 2000 AD as per the minimum needs programme. Though this is by no means sufficient for what is needed since it includes the cost of the mid-day meal programme, it would be better invested had some thought (and resource allocation) been given simultaneously to day care.

**T**hough some advance has been made in terms of policy, whatever be the lacunae in implementation, the rights approach demands that the state be legally accountable to its children. The reason why this process remains far from satisfactory despite public and vocal commitment is because the role of the state in determining the manner in which children are to be cared for raises concerns about the harassment of parents. Also there are fears regarding the ability of the state

to implement such laws.

The first argument is hardly valid given that we have legislation on all sorts of private activities – from marriage to the protection of civil rights. The second argument views the issue from the administrative side alone, not recognising the importance of legislation as a tool for social activists to act against the state (or perhaps recognising this only too well!). That is, appropriate legislation is an enabling provision whereby the state can be compelled to take action.<sup>19</sup>

**I**t is therefore, worthwhile to examine existing laws and their deficiencies. The child enjoys all the fundamental rights available to any citizen of the country. However, the difficulties in implementation, the need to translate directive principles into legislative policies, the special vulnerability of children and their distinct developmental needs – all have resulted in specific central and state legislations which focus on protection and are negative in character.

Though an analysis of all the existing laws does not lie within the purview of this article, priority areas can be demarcated. These include the reviewing of laws to enable and facilitate affirmative action by the state, the need to address existing lacunae, strengthening enforcement machinery, ensuring a uniform definition of the child as a person below the age of 18 and a comprehensive review of the Juvenile Justice Act to make it more effective and child friendly.<sup>20</sup> Comprehensive legislation under a national child care and maternity umbrella is essential to fulfil our commitment to the CRC.

14. Jayshree Vyas, *Anusuya*, April 1997.

15. Sukumar Muralidharan, 'Substance and Artifice', *Frontline*, 21 March 1997.

16. Economic Survey, 1996-97.

17. Reserve Bank of India, Report on Currency and Finance, 1995-96.

18. National Performance Gaps, Partha Dasgupta. *The Progress of Nations*, 1996, UNICEF.

19. Child Labour and Legislation for Compulsory Education, Shantha Seth. 'The Child and The Law', UNICEF, 1994.

20. Draft Report of National Consultation on Rights of the Child, 1994.

Some legal provisions such as the long overdue promise of free and compulsory education must be implemented immediately. The specific needs of the girl child need to be addressed urgently, with more stringent laws banning sex selective foeticide, enforcing minimum age of marriage and stopping dowry.<sup>21</sup> Better laws are required for preventing sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography, child sexual abuse and so on.

**W**omen must be legally empowered to breast feed exclusively for six months and to continue breast feeding into the second year. Paternity benefits should be introduced so that men too can participate in child rearing. The only law that deals directly with this issue, the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961, is a negatively worded law prohibiting dismissal or discharge during pregnancy and arduous work for 10 weeks preceding pregnancy if objected to. It also allows for up to three months of maternity leave, with an additional month of leave with pay in case of pregnancy related complications. Apart from the obvious inadequacies, it excludes from its ambit all working women in the unorganized sector.

Further, we need to sensitise our judicial institutions, law enforcing agencies and the development administration to become more child friendly and demystify the concept of the rights of the child.

Child care needs to be recognised as a profession, more so since it deals with a growing and specially vulnerable group, the well-being of which is fundamental to the health of society. Though expensive, it should be seen as a worthwhile, long run investment, specially since it facilitates returns from other investments in the developmental sector and ulti-

mately helps cut down the need for such investments through its positive cyclic effect. It must be supported through meaningful policies and effective programmes, as also by positive and enabling laws.

There is an urgent need to focus on women in the unorganized sector as they are the needy majority, the ones invariably sidelined, and are the most difficult to reach. Laws and policies for women and children should be converged for effective coordination, proper estimation of resource requirements and for identification of gaps and overlaps. Existing laws and policies for women and older children must be modified to ensure that provisions for children and child care does not suffer.

**N**eeds assessment, programme design and planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation must be decentralised as far as possible, preferably to *panchayats*, in recognition of the fact that child care needs are intimately related to the specific situation of the child and the community she belongs to.

Raising resources for these programmes must continue to be the responsibility of the state, like with other poverty alleviation and minimum needs programmes. Since our socio-economic situation does not allow for a withdrawal by the state, a fixed minimum proportion of the national income should be kept aside for this purpose. This in no way rules out community resource mobilisation and management wherever possible.

None of this can happen without political commitment and will, which if not spontaneously forthcoming will have to be created by advocacy at all levels through a determined nationwide campaign by all those who are concerned for the child and the future of our society.

21. The Child and The Law, UNICEF, 1994.

# Books

**CHILDREN, LAW AND JUSTICE: A South Asian Perspective** by Savitri Goonesekere. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1997.

CHILDREN, Law and Justice is a very exciting book. It treats a subject of vital and growing importance and makes an impressive contribution to the study of child rights in our part of the world. Goonesekere gives plenty of information on the state of children in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Further, it provides a detailed analysis of child rights as given in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as well as other instruments of international law. Finally, it examines the relationship between the child, the family and the state, a thematic that remains a proverbial chestnut to be pulled out of the fire.

The treatise examines the CRC in great detail and from every possible angle. The primary objective is to indicate the ways in which it can be used to protect the child, especially in South Asia. The three main facets to the study are permeated by this living, constant awareness of a need to make the CRC a part of our child related policies and dispute resolutions.

Many of us are ignorant about the state of affairs, legal and actual, in our neighbouring countries. Thus, this book will open unknown vistas to many readers which will help to shed ethnocentric preconceptions about our problems being unique and insoluble. We cannot look to the West to solve our problems about which they know little. Studying the experiences of those who are in a similar predicament would be more instructive for us.

Take for example the thorny question of child marriage. Pakistan, Bangladesh and India share the same Child Marriage Restraint Act, a law that punishes the parents and husband of a minor girl (if he is over 18) but leaves the marriage valid and binding. India passed the Hindu Marriage Act in 1955, which at one stroke rendered invalid all bigamous marriages. It was accepted that women married to bigamous husbands did not do so for 'love', that most of them were given away in marriage by their guardians. Yet, such mar-

riages are *void ab initio* – the women seen as only a mistress, her children as illegitimate. But in the case of child marriage no lobby is in favour of making it void ab initio. Everyone wants to know where the 'poor' girl will go – a question they never ask of the bigamously married bride, whether a major or a minor. The question of how to abolish child marriage still haunts us. We are also unwilling to make registration of marriages compulsory and a prerequisite for recognition by law. We are afraid that unsuspecting women will be ruined by dishonest husbands who may not register the religious ceremony.

Sri Lanka's experience is informative on all these points. The author discusses the salutary effect of Sri Lanka's policies, arguing that providing 'accessible facilities for registration of marriages, and free education from primary to university level (which) have contributed to female literacy and so eliminated child marriage in non-Muslim communities' (pp. 127-28). She further remarks that the incidence of child marriage among the Muslims has also gone down. The author does not use the word 'compulsory' in connection with either registration of marriage or education. It appears that both produce the desired effects once they are easily available and if education is provided at little or no cost to the parents.

The critical comparison of the CRC with the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women is revealing. The author's comment that while the concept of women in development has sometimes resulted in a linkage to child rights, 'women's organisations and groups within Asia as elsewhere, in general, tended to delink children's issues from women's issues' is apt and timely (p. 27, ch. 1). Instances of this delinking are experienced from time to time. For example during the Campaign Against the Child Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Bill in 1986, we found that women *beedi* workers and women in other trades were not in favour of banning child labour. Second, during the current debate in India on population policy, women activists have been heard to say that poor women need their children's earnings. This

delinkage has proved particularly harmful to the cause of introducing free and universal compulsory education at the primary level, as also to attempts to eradicate child labour. In both these areas we have failed to make any headway. The overall conclusion drawn by the author helps us understand the reasons for this failure.

Equally perceptive and perspicacious is the author's examination of public interest litigation or social action litigation in India. She is quick to point out 'a non adversarial procedure is therefore not a timid effort at law enforcement, but a vital and realistic process for ensuring that legal rights give relief and redress' (p. 67). This provides a healthy corrective for Indian activists who are generally too busy to see when (and that is quite often) the government fails to come up to the mark, or even ignores the courts' directives to take note when the government does act on the orders. The author's comments on the nature and limitations of judicial activism should compel them to acknowledge the basic fact that the judiciary cannot achieve everything by itself.

The personal law base makes a new law familiar, and it is therefore more easily obeyed or honoured. On the other hand, the same personal law base limits the extent of reform one can build into it because each system has its own logic and life. From what the author herself says, the notion that the child is an individual graduating from protection to participation, a notion that he is part of the patriarchal family to a recognition of his or her rights, which can even be enforced against the family and the state which is not necessarily *loco parentis*, is not built into personal laws. How she sees us getting around these serious obstacles and reconciling the contradictions inherent in personal laws is of great relevance today.

The author rightly points out that the age of consent, the minimum age for marriage and the minimum age for employment often vary within a given country, thus not coming to a definite conclusion about the upper age limit for childhood (pp. 80-84). In her opinion this lack of a definition of childhood has led to apathy in allocating resources for education and has also left the Child Marriage Restraint Act 'mere policy statements when they are undermined by other policies on education and child labour' (pp. 80-88). In my opinion this is not the full explanation of the reason for which the Child Marriage Act has remained a mere policy statement.

Marriage is governed by family or personal law. All indigenous legal systems, including Islam, recognise child marriage although Islam also gave a

girl bride the option at puberty to repudiate her marriage at the age of 18 years, if it was not consummated. As Goonesekere notes, it was British policy not to intervene in personal law. Their intervention therefore was half-hearted. Perhaps they had no choice. If all customary laws considered the marriage as binding, and for non-Muslims as irrevocable, the British probably did not know how to deal with the fate of children given in marriage. If they made it illegal, customary law would treat them as being married, but the state law would not extend to them the rights that accompany a married status. Among upper castes who disallowed divorce and remarriage to women, child brides would be particularly affected. They would forever be in limbo. Even among Muslims it would be worth investigating how many brides used the option at puberty, or were entitled to do so, and also how remarriage was viewed, especially among the upper class Muslims. The British therefore enacted a most irrational, illogical law. It made child marriage illegal yet valid – a position that would have made Blackstone, Bentham and Macaulay turn in their graves. Imagine any of them drafting a bill which declared that a particular act would be punishable as an offence against the law and yet create rights for the offenders!

When the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed, the minimum age for marriage for girls was put at 14 years in British India. Under S.375 IPC the age of consent for sexual intercourse was 14 years, but intercourse with one's wife was not rape if she was over 13 years of age. In 1978 the minimum age for marriage for girls was raised to 18 and for boys to 21 years. Yet the age of consent for sexual intercourse remains at 16 years and intercourse with one's wife is not rape if she is over 15 years of age. The law on rape has taken social reality (the continuing practice of child marriage) into account; it has also fixed the age of consent on the basis of notions of early maturity of girls in the tropics. The Child Marriage Restraint Act pays heed to neither. Reportedly, the need for population control (as well as the need to be seen as a progressive state) led to the age of marriage being raised in 1978. However, child marriage itself remains valid and binding. To echo the author, the Indian government still lacks the political will to make it void ab initio.

As Goonesekere points out, S.125 Cr.PC (S. 88 in old Cr.PC) is in harmony with the 'feasibility' approach of UN documents on Human Rights (p. 62). But this section requires a parent to support the child only if the parent is able to, and if the child itself is cannot do so. It may be generous to interpret the latter

condition as a child not having a fixed income from properties or from other guardians. But the child himself or herself, however young, must support the parents. This may not be the law, but is the result of the laws which permit children to do paid work or allow parents to use them in place of paid labour.

There is no prohibition of child labour, at least under Indian law. It is only prohibited – apart from ports and railways where the child's entry is forbidden – in hazardous employment in certain specified occupations until the child is 14 years of age. The Act has enough loopholes for it to be ineffective. A child may legally work in a fireworks factory doing 'safe' jobs, whatever they may be. His presence alone is not enough to indict the employer. The list of occupations in which certain jobs are seen as hazardous is extremely limited. For example, domestic work and hotel work are allowed, even though the child may be working with fire, lifting heavy objects, or working long hours. All this is not because there is no synchronisation of the upper age limit of childhood but because children's wages are seen as a necessary supplement to family income, an earning to which the family has a right. It is also because the rights of parents are seen to be superior to those of the child's own right to childhood, education, development and welfare.

This argument surfaced not only during the debate on child rights, but even during the current debate on population policy and development in connection with the Cairo meeting. The traditional notion that the child is the parents' property, to do with as they like, surfaced yet again when female infanticide among certain low caste Tamilians was exposed. The mothers (and the fathers concurred) had argued that if they could give birth to a child, they also had a right to take away its life.<sup>1</sup>

The traditional attitude of the family to the child is also exemplified by the long-standing practices of female infanticide and sacrifice. Sacrifice of one's own child in fulfilment of a vow by beheading it or throwing it into the sea or at the very least abandoning it at a fair in the name of a deity was not unknown to Hindus in India, although the oldest recorded case of child sacrifice is probably from elsewhere – viz. of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac. There is a similar story in the Puranas about the good king Sriyal and his obedient queen Changuna. A particularly evil tempered *Rishi*, with a reputation for putting a curse on anyone who displeased him, visited the royal couple uninvited and

demanding to be fed the flesh of prince Chilaya, their only son. The *Rishi* ordered the mother to kill the boy, dress the meat, cook it, and smile throughout the ritual. As good hosts, the couple rushed to do his bidding. The sage is said to have used his powers to restore the child to his parents by resurrecting him. Both tales suggest that the child was a possession of the father, to do with as he wished.

The author has devoted an entire chapter to participation rights of the child (ch. 8); the CRC refers to them because it envisages the child as a person, not as a possession of its parents or guardians. It is ironic that these perceptions have been used by some proponents of child labour to call for the right of children to work. If the child wishes to work, who are we to say nay? It indicates that no argument is without its pitfalls and requires further study.

Savitri Goonesekere has drawn pertinent conclusions about the problems created by legal pluralism in the area of family law, a legacy of British rule, and correctly remarks that post-independence governments lacked the political will to cope with this heritage and to introduce uniform laws (p. 50). This point could be taken further. I have given one example when discussing the reasons for the non-implementation of the Child Marriage Act.

The author's comments on the necessity for a uniform civil legal system code needs elaboration. Does she contemplate a code that has incorporated the best from personal, family, religious, customary and indigenous laws as seems to be implied in her remarks (pp. 19-22 *passim*) or does she contemplate one in which the inspiration is drawn from the Convention? (p. 59) The latter might make a logically crafted cohesive whole; but it could be alien to the people and more difficult to implement.

The former will be familiar, more easily obeyed, but difficult to make perfect or cohesive. There are limits to the alterations that can be introduced in a legal system, especially one that is endorsed by religion. This is what happened with the judgment in the Shah Bano<sup>2</sup> case to which Goonesekere extensively refers (pp. 55-56), where denial of maintenance to Muslim divorcees was sought to be justified in terms of the Shariat (pp. 13-14).

Before ending the review of this extremely thought provoking book, I would like to point to a few inaccuracies. The codified Hindu law confers legitimacy on any child *in utero* at any given point of time

1. *Female Infanticide* by R. Venkatachalam and Viji Srinivasan. Har-Anand Publications, Delhi, 1997.

2. Mohd. Ahmed Khan vs. Shah Bano Begum, AIR 1985 SC 945.

when the marriage was in subsistence. Thus, even if dissolution of a marriage is obtained before the child is born on the ground that the wife was, unknown to her husband, pregnant at the time of the marriage by a man other than the husband, the child is still considered a legitimate child born of that marriage and will inherit from the father though not from other relatives.

Under S.20 of the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956, a legitimate as well as an illegitimate child is entitled to maintenance so long as the child is a minor. Under S.16 of the Hindu Marriage Act, children of a marriage that is voidable under S.12 and in which a decree of nullity has been obtained, are legitimate children of the marriage. However, in such cases the father does not obtain guardianship of the child.

There was a substantial difference between custody and guardianship in British India. This is still the position today. The latter is a superior right which subsists even when the child is in another's custody. The mother is usually given custody till the child is of a certain age. The guardianship, even then, is of the father. In divorce cases even now, custody is usually given to the mother but not guardianship. A guardian taking his child away from the custodian commits no offence, certainly not of kidnapping, which in the Indian Penal Code S. 359 is defined as an offence against guardianship. A mother's signature is frequently not acceptable, not being that of the guardian.

But these are minor points which do not take away from the work in any significant way. It treats a subject of vital and growing importance and makes an impressive contribution to the study of child rights in our part of the world. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is yet to permeate thinking in South Asia, which makes this work all the more valuable.

This work concentrates on India and Sri Lanka. There is a limited discussion of the Pakistan and Bangladesh situation, but little on Nepal and almost nothing on Bhutan and Maldives. We need to know more about the laws for children, as well as their actual situation and problems in these countries. Nepal has offered legitimacy to children born outside wedlock. If a woman claims that a man has fathered her child, it will be acknowledged as legitimate. But if the man is married, both of them will be prosecuted for adultery. Bangladesh has reformed the Shariat law on inheritance. Under the Shariat, inheritance passes in an unbroken line from father to son. Should the middle link, i.e. the father be dead, the grandson cannot inherit from the grandfather. Legislation which would do precisely that had been enacted by Bangladesh in 1992.

The child whose father has died can now inherit from his grandfather.

The manner in which Savitri Goonesekere's information as well as arguments are presented is persuasive rather than polemical or combative. It encourages even the most dogmatic of persons taking the opposite view to listen.

This work can be read with great profit by law teachers, students of law and, of course, judges and lawyers; most certainly by our politicians and bureaucrats – should any of them be presumed to have serious reading habits. Any campaign to first create and then increase the impact of the Convention on domestic laws must include this class.

Savitri Goonesekere ably displays a wealth of knowledge to present her thinking, albeit in a dense and compact style. But the reward for getting past this hurdle will be great indeed.

**Vasudha Dhagamwar**

**CENTURIES OF CHILDHOOD** by Philippe Aries.  
Vintage, New York, 1962.

**DIVASWAPNA** by Gijubhai Badheka. National Book Trust, Delhi, 1990 (first published in 1931).

**MISEDUCATION: Pre-schoolers at Risk** by D. Elkind. Routledge and Keagan Paul, London, 1987.

**THE MAGICAL CHILD** by Joseph Chilton Pearce.  
Bantam Books, Toronto, 1977.

THE dominant view of childhood invariably reflects the spirit of the times. The prevalent philosophy is mirrored in the manifold publications on the issue, each of which highlight the writer's standpoint. We see ourselves today as being child-centred and child-focused. But this is in actuality a fallacy. We have only to examine our educational policies and the expectations parents have of their children to realise that we are merely paying lip-service to the concept of child-centredness. Ultimately it is parental dictates that are paramount.

There are many books on the subject of childhood – some which can be read, re-read, chewed and digested, which would occupy pride of place on any bookshelf. Three of the books referred to here belong to that category; the fourth suffers somewhat in comparison.

*Centuries of Childhood* by Philippe Aries is a path-breaking effort by a social historian, an incisive, informative work that seeks to determine the place of the child in the context of social history. In the West the child has received little recognition as having needs distinct from those of the adult. The child was seen only as a 'miniature adult' who consequently could be treated as an adult with no distinct status. It was only the efforts of educationists and some social philosophers which contributed to the current understanding of the 'rights' of the child as distinct from those of the adult. Concurrently, the belief evolved that the child be treated differently, finally leading to legislative measures targeted specifically at the child.

The understanding of the child's nature altered depending on the philosophy, ranging from a tabula rasa to the noble savage, from the mechanical mirror to the organic lamp. Today we see the child as an active participant involved in the shaping of his life. This is a 20th century perspective. Earlier eras preferred to have the child as someone to be seen not heard; someone passive on whom adult dictates would be inscribed; someone who had no independent entity or voice of his own.

Aries's book, published in 1962, is an erudite expression of historical perspectives of childhood in the western context. It is perhaps ironical that the much-lauded child-centredness is of fairly recent origin in the West, dating back to only about a century. In contrast, the Orient has always been more receptive to the needs of the child, as is demonstrated through its folklore, songs and epic tales. *Centuries of Childhood* is essential reading for anyone interested in the understanding of the evolution of the concept of childhood which is so central to understanding the child.

Recently I read a parable on education. The title of the book intrigued me. *Divaswapna* by Gijubhai Badheka. The title itself means a day-dream, wishful thinking that could not come to fruition. I was moved and read it from cover to cover in a single sitting. Though written in 1931, the book retains a freshness that makes reading it a pleasure.

It is an allegorical tale of an idealistic teacher determined to use new systems of teaching to revitalise learning. It enumerates the strategies through which a teacher can interest and motivate the student to learn. The fictional school-teacher runs into various obstacles – the student, parents, colleagues, superiors on the Education Board – all of whom regard his unconventional approach with a scepticism bordering on disbelief. After muddling along for a while, the results

begin to show; his students become desirous to learn, curious, questioning, and develop a zest for life and learning that sets them apart from other children in the school.

The book presents an idealistic vision of a classroom where the teacher serves as a facilitator, steering children in the direction of knowledge; where everyday life situations are used to teach physics, maths and grammar. Piaget would have been delighted to read the book as it provides first-hand evidence on the importance of a committed teacher who instills in his students the desire to learn by doing. It reaffirms that the teacher needs to answer questions, be motivated, have a firm set of convictions to adhere to and climb down from the ivory tower in which he is ensconced. A 'must read' for all educationists and those interested in children.

Elkind's book, *Miseducation: Pre-schoolers at Risk*, was published in 1987. It is a damning indictment of the state of pre-school education prevailing in America. It should be read along with *The Hurried Child* to give a complete picture of the hazards of not allowing children to develop at their own pace. It conjures up a nightmarish picture of a childhood divorced from the joys associated with it. It is particularly relevant for urban Indians, preoccupied as they are with accelerating learning. Elkind warns of the dangers that could arise if the expectations of parents and teachers determine education policy. His is a voice of moderation, speaking for the child.

I could conjure up clear images of an ideal pre-school – a warm, nurturing teacher, an ideal teacher-child ratio of 1:15, well-lit airy classrooms with plenty of materials which the children are encouraged to play with, an emphasis on social interaction between children rather than on formal education, and adequate outdoor space. It seems a pity that pre-schools, originally intended for gradually orienting a child to an environment other than the family, rarely serve this function any longer. They have been subverted, serving instead as training grounds for ensuring admission of children into good primary schools. Good being determined by academic achievement, rather than the holistic development of a child who is interested in learning, who feels that asking a question will not merit punishment or reprimand, who is not in danger of suffering burn-out. Elkind demonstrates a rare concern for the needs of the pre-school child to develop at her own pace.

The message communicated by Elkind is to create an ethos of genuine care for the child – cognitively, emotionally, socially and physically. This is a book.

likely to prod those involved in education into thinking. All pre-schools that have mushroomed in various parts of the country should take a page or two from the book. It is a serious, insightful book written by one who is truly committed to the child.

In a different vein is the much talked about book by a pop guru of our times, *The Magical Child* by Chilton Pearce. While the contents of the book are above suspicion, its tone is one of condescension and, worse, of flippancy. It is a book that tries to make a 'profound statement.' The abiding impression at the end of the book is one of 'so what?', accompanied by a feeling of being let-down. Though not intended as a conventional text for lay persons, it ultimately ends up being just that.

These are only a few of the books for the discerning reader on childhood, a phenomenon which has preoccupied us for the last three decades or so. In our fiftieth year of independence, we need to celebrate childhood and all it implies.

**Sujata Sriram**

**JUVENILE JUSTICE AND JUVENILE CORRECTION: *Pride and Prudence* by M.S. Sabnis.**  
Somaiya Publications, Bombay, 1996.

SOCIAL defence, penology, correction, and the juvenile justice system are the four inter-related concentric sub-disciplines of the more comprehensive, composite discipline of sociological criminology. The juvenile justice system which addresses itself primarily to the juvenile offender, and secondarily to the neglected or socially deprived child, or the child 'at social risk', may conceptually be viewed as occupying the centre of the inner circle of correction. The social and legal processes to which the juvenile is exposed derive their validity from the principles, procedures and programmes of all the four sub-disciplines.

The juvenile justice system radials may be viewed as intersecting at various points of the circumference of the four circles (sub-disciplines). This ensures a pivotal place for juvenile justice in the social defence system, simultaneously laying varying emphasis on all its six main elements: detection, deterrence, adjudication and disposition, institutionalisation (correctional treatment), or non-institutional treatment, prevention and rehabilitation.

These concepts form the main themes of discussion in M.S. Sabnis' work. This volume attempts to describe what is and what ought to be in the field of

child welfare and juvenile justice in the country. It also provides an overview of the historical and sociological processes that account for the present state of child welfare services.

The purpose of writing the book is: (a) to bring under one canopy the different ideas and concepts which the author assimilated through his reading and discussions with teachers, scholars, practitioners and workers at various levels in child welfare, social welfare and correctional administration; (b) to stimulate the thinking of students of sociology and social administration, professional child welfare workers, probation officers and others engaged in work relating to child welfare and juvenile justice; and (c) to interest the lay reader in programmes of social development and social security which have the potential to influence the specific programmes for child welfare and child development.

This book is a collection of articles by the author published earlier in professional journals or presented at various conferences. They embrace a variety of social issues which influence the conduct, character and development of the child and the young adolescent. Among the more important social issues discussed are: juvenile deviance, juvenile welfare and juvenile justice, juvenile vagrancy and juvenile delinquency, prevention and social defence and juvenile correction and rehabilitation.

Juvenile deviance is but a small portion of the larger phenomenon of social deviance. A deviant act is almost always a socially disapproved non-conformist one or, sometimes, a legally prohibited act. Such an act is considered to lie beyond permissible observance limits, the limits set either by the culturally determined, socially approved conduct norms or by the statutorily defined, legal norms (p. 99).

Social change affects traditions, social institutions, beliefs and attitudes. Social mobility, demographic pressures, social and economic disparities, increased social tensions, clash of ideologies and problems arising out of social, industrial, scientific and technological change—all these and more have brought about a transformation of established social, economic and cultural institutions and value systems. Thus today society or, more accurately, the younger generation faces a vivid 'crisis of values' (p. 108).

If the home, family, school, peers, near relatives and neighbours could provide the wherewithal for the satisfaction of the basic needs of children and a right environment for their physical, emotional and intellectual nourishment, the possibility of their being drawn



into the vortex of deviant behaviour would be considered remote (p. 99).

To better understand the concept of delinquency, the author rightly draws a distinction between 'classification of delinquency' and 'classification of delinquents' (p. 141). He has also discussed in detail the various theories of causes of crime or delinquency and other forms of social deviance (p. 129).

The author analyses juvenile vagrancy, its causes and the preventive measures needed to curb it. He argues that a large number of pre-delinquents in a metropolis like Bombay, come from the migratory or seasonally migratory population (p. 111). Their children continuously live at a tangent and form the major juvenile vagrant population. Thus one has to think in terms of controlling in-migration at certain points, and deal with them in a planned, organised and concerted way (p. 112).

Discussing the history of child welfare legislation in India, the author says that social legislation for the protection, care, training and rehabilitation of deprived or neglected children in India has been more a matter of covert charity and concealed patronage than the outcome of a consciously conceived, co-ordinated, coherent social policy (p. 4).

The Juvenile Justice Act 1986 (JJA) is a judicious mix of old wine contained in the Children Act 1960 with some vintage wine contained in a state enactment like the Bombay Children Act, 1948. Juvenile justice does not merely consist in undoing injustice. State intervention and official action envisaged in the JJA is calculated to undo, or to mitigate the consequences of, an act of injustice done to the juvenile who is found to be living in, or exposed to, an unfavourable social environment. The central thesis is that endeavour at social development must aim at social justice, equality of opportunity, and removal of social disabilities in every form (p. 51).

The author discusses the principles of UN Standard Minimum Rules for Administration of Juvenile Justice (better known as the Beijing Rules), the provisions of JJA and their inter-relationship, the institutional and non-institutional treatment of juveniles (specially delinquent juveniles), juvenile correction and welfare ethics, and aftercare and rehabilitation of juveniles.

The book, however, does not locate the judicial decisions within the larger discourse. This is a serious omission. The book refers to juvenile institutions as juvenile correctional institutions. Though the author clarifies that the concept of correction has undergone an overall change and that juvenile correction differs

from systems of adult correction, it is advisable that in order to minimise the social stigma attached to criminal persecution we avoid the use of criminal proceeding terminologies, particularly while discussing juvenile justice.

The National Policy for Children declares that, 'The nation's children are a supremely important asset. Their nurture is our responsibility.' The book is a reminder that despite building a basic framework for the welfare of socio-economically deprived children, little has been done for them. Though often tedious and repetitive, the book underlines the importance of protecting juveniles in the political, administrative, judicial and social circles.

**Ananya Dasgupta**

**MENTAL HEALTH IN INDIAN SCHOOLS** by  
Malavika Kapur. Sage Publications, New Delhi,  
1997.

SCHOOLS play a vital role in the psycho-social development of children and adolescents. A close bond with a nurturing, sensitive teacher can go a long way in preventing mental and emotional disorders in adulthood. Unfortunately, awareness about primary prevention and mental health issues is lacking in most Indian schools.

Malavika Kapur's book, *Mental Health in Indian Schools*, documents her effort to create awareness by introducing mental health programmes within the school setting. This comprehensive work systematically outlines the design and implementation of an impressive number of projects undertaken by the author (a Professor in the Department of Clinical Psychology at NIMHANS, Bangalore) and her team over a period of 20 years. The subject material is organized in chapters entitled, Interventions in school settings, Training in counselling, Specific strategies to help children with problems, School mental health in rural areas, Evaluation of service research, Policy perspectives and child mental health in India, and Implications of the work in India for developing countries and in the global context.

The description of intervention strategies for children with specific problems at school demonstrates the possibility of manageable, cost-effective school-based programmes. The author used play therapy for children with emotional disorders, behaviour modification in a group setting for those with hyperkinetic conduct disorders, and remedial coaching for children with scho-

lastic backwardness. The simple programmes have been lucidly described and illustrated with case studies. Unfortunately, although the author reviews the potential for working with groups of adolescents in school settings, it does not seem to have been followed through.

In the chapter on school mental health in rural areas, the author and her colleagues have ventured 'where angels fear to tread' – into a village called Doddamalur, 95 km from Bangalore – where they set up a consultancy and training programme within a school. Despite initial resistance from some teachers, they managed to identify and help many children, families and the community at large. They concluded that first, work in rural settings often has to take the form of concrete services like liaising with available medical services in the catchment area and providing adequate play and study material. Second, working as a mental health consultant attached to a school can provide opportunities for community based, social action work in problem areas such as alcoholism and gambling.

The programmes included orientation courses on mental health (ch. 2) which were conducted in schools all over the country. The courses educated teachers and principals through lecture sessions, case discussions, role-plays, summarized handouts of the lectures and information about where to refer the identified cases of epilepsy, speech, language or psychiatric problems. Following the orientation courses, schools were offered teacher training in counselling. Four schools opted for training which was carried out over 12 sessions of 90 minutes each spread out over an entire academic year. The training involved reading the manual entitled, 'Process in Counselling' designed by the author and group discussions regarding case management.

A limitation of the programme was that there was no recorded input on actual counselling skills like empathy, clarification, probing and reflecting that make up most training programmes on counselling. These could have been included through role plays, as that was a method in the orientation programmes described by most teachers as useful. The interventions by teachers in the documented case-studies makes one wonder about the effectiveness of training in counselling. The interventions described show that the teachers were dedicated and caring, and often that alone can help many students. Perhaps the counsellor training increased their awareness of reasons for problem behaviour (mentioned in the evaluation) and provided a forum for them to discuss situations where they were

stuck. But did it succeed in training teachers to be counsellors?

The inclusion of additional case-vignettes and qualitative rather than quantitative data would have helped bring the subject matter to life and provide the reader with insights about the nature of the problems encountered as well as possible interventions. Working with support groups for parents who have children with specific problems or facilitating workshops for parents within the schools is another area not dealt with by the author.

Mental Health In Indian Schools generates exciting ideas about the ways in which mental health practitioners, given a lack of financial resources, can contribute in the crucial area of primary prevention through school-based programmes. The author works sensitively with school, family and community systems and with class, culture and context. Her book offers hope that we can pioneer, sustain and continuously assess mental health programmes in India.

Reenee Singh

**CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN: Radhika's Story**  
by Indeera Chand. HarperCollins, Delhi, 1997.

Radhika's Story is Indeera Chand's account of her daughter who is a Down's child. The term 'Mongoloid', now outdated, was once used for such people because they are characterized by slightly slanting eyes.

Chand says it was a nightmare to think that her child may not live beyond the age of twenty and may never learn to speak. That was in fact the fate of many Down's children who were regarded as "severely retarded" (and) raised in unspeakable neglect. Radhika Chand is now twenty-five years old. Over the years, her parents have struggled to understand Down's syndrome. They learnt that most Down's children range from a 'mild to moderate' range of retardation and that their potential has not yet been realized. Chand is emphatic, however, that retardation is quite different from being mentally challenged as Radhika is. She is able to learn, though in ways different to the mass of children.

The Chand's also sought better facilities for their daughter than they found in most places in India. They were fortunate to have the wherewithal to take Radhika from city to city. In Calcutta and Bombay they found gifted teachers who worked on a virtually one-to-one basis with Down's children. But the school system necessary to help them adjust to larger social groups was

missing. They then went to other countries. In Australia they found a wonderful school as well as social support which helped Radhika to become semi-independent. There they learnt the 'sober truth' that though she was intellectually subnormal, Radhika was not 'that "idiot" of her mother's nightmare.' Her immense talent as a painter was discovered and nurtured. She has held exhibitions and – very reluctantly – sold her paintings. Currently, she has a job as a teaching assistant to an art teacher in a regular school. She plays the piano and conducts herself with dignity in public. In the characteristic Down's way, she is warmly affectionate.

She is also yet another reminder of what was pointed out to me by my students years ago when a physically challenged girl joined their class. 'Ma'am, *she* makes it easy for us to be with her. We were all so embarrassed to even look at her in the beginning.' We 'normal' people do put the onus of becoming acceptable on the 'not-normal'. It increases the burden on the challenged individuals and their families, but every so often the family takes up the challenge of educating us as Chand has done.

Medical knowledge about Down's syndrome may still be inadequate but parents of Down's children are truly desperate for information about what to expect by way of a daily routine, the joys and fears of parents and children, the possibility of social rejection and how to handle it, rejection from schools, where to find help for their children, how to get reliable information about their condition. Radhika's Story fills that gap.

Chand starts at the beginning with the signs of a possibly abnormal foetus during her pregnancy, and her subsequent refusal to accept that there was anything unusual about the child. After this came the fear, anger and guilt. Chand is ruthlessly honest. Surely that is what will help other parents who too may feel guilty for feeling angry that life has been unfair to them. In fact, a reviewer who also has a mentally challenged child has appreciated Chand's frankness about a mother's guilt. Chand's guilt and anger resurfaced over the years with varying emphases. But her lasting anxiety is that Radhika will never be entirely independent, and after the parents who will care for her?

Inevitably, the book is about the parents as well as the daughter. The parents had to learn how to repeat instructions to Radhika and in what order so that she would understand their importance and retain them. They rejoiced when Radhika rejoiced and learnt to be patient when she lost her temper in frustration. They

discovered that just as Radhika was being taught by them, they too were learning from Radhika, especially the joy of what would have been small achievements in 'normal' children.

Down's children have characteristic physical problems, such as feet that tend to turn inward, soft bones, bad eyesight and poor skin. In Radhika's case most of these were not too difficult to resolve. But bad teeth remained a problem. Radhika is terrified of dentists and that adds to the trauma of treatment. Then there have been Radhika's milestones, each raising new challenges, especially during adolescence. Because of her slowness in absorbing a new idea, she had to be prepared well in advance of the anticipated changes in her body, with each aspect taught to her separately and slowly. For instance, she was prepared for menstruation by her mother showing her what it is and how to use sanitary protection. Like all Down's children, Radhika's trusting openness makes her talk about everything in public. So she had to be told over and over again that menstruation is not talked about in public.

Yet, although help for the Down's child must come from within the home, institutional support is desperately needed. Chand details Radhika's routine in her Sydney school, turning it into a blueprint for possible replication here.

Radhika's Story has already been extensively reviewed. The sillier reviews have talked of Chand's 'wistfulness' and 'indirect appeal' to our better selves, and, missing the point entirely, wished that Chand had not been so 'repellingly' honest about her daughter's personal problems since the child deserves her privacy. Others have rightly seen it as a guide for concerned people. Chand is direct and unsqueamish in detailing each action and the exact words she used to teach Radhika. So her book stays well out of the range of 'wistfulness'. It is a practical, 'How to' book to help parents, teachers and all those interested in helping the relatively helpless Down's child. Chand's language is so clear and direct that even the technical details about the syndrome are easy for a lay person to follow.

Radhika's Story has already increased awareness about Down's syndrome. A principal of a junior school, for instance, told me that after reading it she felt terribly guilty for having turned away such children in the past since she had been completely ignorant about Down's syndrome.

The book must be widely read. And for it to be of real help, it must be translated as well.

**Shobhana Bhattacharji**

# Research

WITHIN home science education, the discipline of child development has acquired greater salience. Today, other than our universities, agricultural colleges (through their home science courses) and medical college (through the preventive and social medicine course) offer training in child development. The pioneering institutions, however, have been Lady Irwin College, Delhi and the home science department at the MS University, Baroda. We provide below a summary of research in the last 25 years (1972 to 1995) at the child development department of Lady Irwin College, Delhi. It attempts to focus on research concerns that help understand children in different social and cultural contexts. The research is compiled under three sub-heads (i) infant care (ii) early childhood education and (iii) disability. It is extracted from Meeting the Needs of the Child in India, Conference Report, 1-3 February 1996.

## (I) Review of Research in Infant Care

There have been several studies on infancy conducted at the department. By and large, this age group has been relatively less researched due to its lower accessibility. The studies in this area can be categorized into the following: (i) infant care practices in various ethnic groups; (ii) different aspects of infant care; (iii) evaluation of early child care practices; (iv) role of father in infant care; (v) special cases of parent-infant dyads; and (vi) infant care and stimulation.

### *Infant Care Practices in Various Ethnic Groups*

The ethnic groups studied include the Nairs of Kerala, Mizos, Nicobarees, Mitta Gond tribals of Jagdalpur, Tankul Nagas of Manipur, Punjabis, and Kashmiri Pandits. These studies have taken students to far-flung regions like Pauri Garhwal and Bhutan. Data was gathered through observations and interviews of parents and caregivers. Major areas of investigation

include pregnancy, childbirth, dietary patterns of mothers during pregnancy and lactation and practices in care. Some findings from the studies are presented below.

Pregnant mothers in all communities face several restrictions on their movement to ensure the birth of a healthy baby. For example, pregnant mothers in Aizwal were advised not to sit with their back towards the fire as heat was believed to dry up the uterus which could lead to the death of the mother. There were several practices in each community related to food intake during pregnancy and lactation. Mother's cravings for specific products were often explained as being indicative of specific features in the child. Across all communities, special foods were given to the lactating mother to help her regain strength and vitality after childbirth.

Most children in the families studied were born in hospital settings rather than the home. Traditional practices related to childbirth have varied across communities. Adult neighbours and relatives were often reported to have assisted midwives during delivery. In the Mitta Gond tribals, no male member was allowed inside the room during delivery whereas in Thimpu, Bhutan, and among Tankul Nagas of Nagaland, the husband actively assisted his wife during and after childbirth.

The mother and her infant stayed in confinement for a period varying between three and forty days in all families.

*Different Aspects of Infant Care:* In all the families and communities studied, breast-feeding of the infant was on demand. Traditionally, mothers discarded the colostrum after birth. It was found that under the doctor's advice, many mothers were now feeding this to their children. The influence of modernization was seen in the weaning foods given to the infants with the mother's displaying a clear preference for Farex and Cerelac over traditional foods until the next pregnancy or until lactation stopped.

Bathing the child was a daily ritual usually preceded by a massage. Mothers traditionally used natural oils for the massage. Some of the popular brands of baby oils were also being frequently used. Toilet training was reported to be gradual and without strict regulation. Infants invariably slept with the parents, whether on beds or on the floor. Infants were put to sleep by rocking, crooning, stroking and patting, often accompanied by traditional songs. Thus, all communities provided for infants to experience the joy of movement and songs.

All respondents reported the use of home remedies for treatment of minor illnesses in the child. Visits to the hospital were restricted to major episodes. Folk practices were more frequent in families which resided in joint households as compared to nuclear families.

*Evaluation of Early Child Care Practices:* The availability and quality of care in day-care centres was evaluated to assess alternatives available to the working mother in Delhi. This indicated that the care available was primarily custodial, with the cognitive and affective components of care being neglected. Interviews with parents revealed that the need for cognitive interaction was not perceived as an important aspect by them as well. There was a clear absence of a child-oriented approach in planning the early child care services.

*Role of the Father in Infant Care:* Physical care of the young child has seldom been the responsibility of men in traditional Indian society. However, the image of the father that emerged from these studies was one of an enthusiastic, eager and nurturant parent, who looks forward to being involved in the infant's life right from the foetal stage. The findings indicate that 'play' was an important dimension of the father's interactions. However, fathers did not participate in looking after the baby during an illness and bathing the child. In families where the mother was employed, the father was more involved in the care of the infant. It was also found that the father's participation increased with the age of the infant, particularly in case of male infants.

*Special Cases of Parent-Infant Dyads:* Parenting which is often a demanding task for most people, becomes even more so if either the parent or the infant has some special needs. Investigations of infants of visually impaired parents showed that blind parents could, in general, perform the infant care activities adequately. The absence of eye-to-eye contact did not lead to deficits in attachment and other areas of development. However, there were some areas where the interactions were affected such as monitoring the infant's behaviour, particularly mobility, expressive language of the baby, and rough and tumble play of the infant. Infants were found to be growing up to become sensitive to their parent's needs. A follow-up study showed that some of the inadequacies in parenting had been overcome partly because of the child's maturity and because of the impact of interventions carried out as a result of the earlier study.

*Infant Care and Stimulation:* A project undertaken by the department examined research reports of

infant care practices and early child care programmes. For this purpose several kinds of functionaries in health and welfare were interviewed. Their responses pointed towards a general lack of attention to the need for social, cognitive and verbal interaction with the infant.

(II) Review of Research in Early Childhood Education Research in this area has focused on the following: (i) evaluation of preschool programmes; (ii) influence of the preschool on later education; (iii) impact of the ICDS experience on academic performance; and (iv) preparation of educational aids.

*Evaluation of Preschool Programmes:* The studies in this area have used several techniques to assemble comprehensive assessments of ongoing programmes. These include check-lists, observations, interviews of teachers and parents. The institutions covered were *balwadis*, *anganwadis* and nursery schools run by individuals. The findings reveal that the physical infrastructure, facilities, equipment and material was below the minimum standards required of preschool programmes prescribed by NCERT. In case of the *balwadi* programme, financial constraints were found to be the main reason for poor quality. However, this was not found to interfere with the provision of educational services to children attending the programme. Teacher motivation was high as was the motivation of the community to send their children.

In the privately run small nursery school too, the services were much below the desirable standard. Further, these were found to be mere centres of custodial care for children where little else besides the teaching of the three R's took place. These centres seemed to provide for the parents' 'desires' rather than the children's needs.

Some of the recommendations of the studies are:

- \* Need to develop child-centred, well-defined programmes.
- \* Programmes, policies and practices should give increased attention to interpersonal relationships between parents and the school.
- \* Programmes should include periodic and ongoing evaluation.
- \* Teachers need to be sensitized towards the developmental needs of children.
- \* There should be a continuation of these aspects in the formal school system to reinforce and strengthen positive developmental gains in children.
- \* Comprehensive, explicit and realistic legislation should be evolved to regulate the standards of services.

*Influence of Preschool on Later Education:* The findings in this area indicate that multitude of factors of early education influence later education and adjustment rather than any one isolated factor like attendance of nursery school. Adjustment during the transition from preschool to formal school was an important variable investigated since it is the key determinant influencing performance at school. It was reported that in cases where children had attended mere downward extensions of grade I in preschool, they did not benefit much from the experience. Further, it was suggested that the extension of preschool education strategies into later education may also lead to boredom in the older child. Thus, developmentally appropriate classrooms are essential to sustain children's interests and facilitate learning.

Another finding was that the preschool attended was not the only factor influencing adjustment. An interaction between the home and the school was found to be essential in facilitating school adjustment. Other variables were the child's self-concept, feelings regarding school, teacher and parental expectations. Children attending good, child-centred preschools were found to do significantly better on cognitive and other tasks.

Location of the school was an important factor determining the choice of school in middle class families. There was a wide variety in the responses of the parents regarding the significance of preschool education. It could be concluded that there was actually a widespread lack of awareness in this area.

Though parents expressed concern regarding the movement of the child from the preschool to formal school, the findings did not demonstrate any such difficulty. Teachers also expressed the view that adjustment was not a problem at this level.

*Impact of ICDS Experience on Academic Performance:* Findings from studies comparing ICDS to non-ICDS children in later classes indicate that there are no significant differences in performance between the two groups. This was found to be lower than expected for both groups. This was explained by the inadequacy of the preschool component in the ICDS programme, the attitude of the teacher, who was often overworked, and poor family support for preschool education.

*Preparation of Educational Aids:* The kits developed focused on the area of language development in a sequential manner and various language skills like alphabet learning, word recognition, sentence structure, articulation and communication.

The area of early childhood education has been a priority in the research of the department. It is

important at this juncture to identify key issues in the process of early learning and consolidate findings from close observations of teaching-learning situations rather than merely rely on surveys of educational programmes now readily available from several sources.

### (III) Review of Research in Disability

The department of child development is committed to comprehensive and innovative research. There is strong orientation towards working in applied areas, childhood disability being one of the major concerns.

The child with special needs is offered as a special course at the Master's level. In addition, there are three programmes for children with special needs affiliated to the department. These include Sangam, under the Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur Centre; Anubhav, a programme of the DSA scheme of the UGC; and the Enabling Centre, funded by the Ministry of HRD. The objective of these activities is to extend expertise to the community, prepare professionals, and strengthen research in the field of childhood disability. Since 1972, 26 Masters' dissertations have researched different aspects of disability and generated extensive data. A summary of these is presented under the following areas: (i) education for children with special needs; (ii) family dynamics; (iii) psycho-social profile of children with disability; and (iv) community awareness and attitudes.

#### *Education of Children with Special Needs:*

Research in this area has focused on:

- \* Cognitive development of children with mental retardation;
- \* Development of material for teaching specific concepts;
- \* Integrated education.

These studies have been comparative and exploratory with some leading to intervention in the area of education. An outcome of the studies has been the identification of significant factors in the micro-environment of the educational setting like classrooms, instructional strategies and attitudes of others. The studies point towards the need to investigate the child as a whole rather than as someone who is simply assessed, categorized and given special treatment. It is important to view the child as valued and belonging to a supportive society by the researcher and the educationist.

*Family Dynamics:* Studies in this area have attempted to discern the impact of the disability on the family, familial attitudes towards the child, coping

mechanisms of the family and their influence on the socialization of the child. These are case studies of children and their families with the objective of understanding family dynamics. The importance of providing support to the family in the care and education of the child has been repeatedly highlighted. However, the uniqueness of each family with a disabled child and the difficulties faced by them always stands out. Somehow, the case studies have not been successful in highlighting the strengths of families which have been able to sustain themselves despite stressful situations. The area of advocacy by parents for themselves and the child is an theme that needs more attention.

*Psycho-social Profiles:* Studies have focused on the perceptions of children with disability about the self, family, community, peers, marriage and stressful situations such as hospitalization. These studies have relied on the case study method and have generated valuable data on the needs of children as expressed by them. An important emerging research issue is the need to view the disabled child as a person before studying the disabling condition. An effort needs to be made to develop a more sensitive perspective of children with special needs.

*Community Awareness and Attitudes:* Prejudices and attitudes towards children with disability have been studied using intervention techniques for reducing prejudice. The techniques for removing misconceptions about disability and the disabling condition are establishing contact with children, using role-play and discussing these issues with the community that the children are part of. How the members of the community can be involved to support the children, and how children and families can themselves seek support from others and what could be effective communication strategies remain important unanswered questions.

The researches on disability highlight the need to:

- \* View the child with special needs as first and foremost a child;
- \* Recognize the strengths of individual children and their families;
- \* Understand the importance of community support in order to facilitate optimal development of the child;
- \* Make the parents aware that they must speak for themselves and for the child and form linkages with other parents and organizations.

Further research in the area of disability must help in promoting, supporting and providing for families with children with special needs.

# Institutional support

AS parents, educators and adults we need to provide familial as well as out of family care to our children. There is an awareness of this need for varied services and opportunities for the young. Both government effort and non-governmental enterprise are attempting to create an optimal environment for the growth and development of children. Individuals and organisations have developed programmes to provide care, protection, education, recreation and remedial supportive work to our children.

Some centres are described below. This is not an exhaustive listing, only an attempt to introduce the nature of existing facilities available for children.

**National Institute for the Visually Handicapped, Dehradun.**

This institution, set up by the Ministry of Education, is the apex body for the welfare of the blind. The institute's objectives are: (i) training of personnel to work with the blind; (ii) research and development to evolve services and programmes for the blind; and (iii) information and public education through awareness about the blind.

The institute runs the following programmes: (a) a pre school for the blind; (b) a training centre for the adult blind in conventional and non conventional trades for men and women in the ages 18-40 years; (c) a crisis intervention centre to provide therapeutic assistance and adjustment training to the newly blinded; (d) workshops on aids and appliances to produce reading, computing and recreational aids at subsidised prices; (e) a central braille press; and (f) a national library for the print handicapped—a library of braille books.

**National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped (NIMH), Hyderabad.**

Set up by the Ministry of Welfare, NIMH is committed to: (i) developing models of care for the mentally handicapped; (ii) conducting research in the area of MR (mental retardation); and (iii) promoting human resource development to work with MR.

NIMH provides: (a) extension services to identify disability and involve the community to work for the MR; (b) day care centre for providing care facilities; (c) a model school for MR children; (d) guidance for parents: directional help for parents of MR children; and (e) placement cell: vocation for MR children. Further,

it provides a structured environment for research with the aim to strengthen teachers skills, enhance competence of parents, training of MR children, and training of personnel through diploma and short term courses, seminars and workshops, early intervention, and materials for MR children and social workers.

**National Institute for the Orthopaedically Handicapped (NIOH), Calcutta.**

Set up by the Ministry of Welfare, NIOH provides comprehensive rehabilitation and trains personnel for manpower development. It conducts 3 long-term courses: diploma in physiotherapy, occupational therapy and orthotics and prosthetic engineering.

Its services include *Research*: (a) designing of improved low cost aids and appliances; (b) corrective treatment methods; (c) survey of disabilities and problems of disabled persons; (d) materials for creating awareness for disability. *Standardising*: (a) distribution of aids and appliances; (b) compilation of directory of organisations working for the locomotor disabled in India. *Specialised Services for*: (a) spinal cord injuries; (b) post polio syndrome; (c) amputees; (d) cerebral palsy; (e) arthritis; (f) muscular dystrophy. *Reachout Programme*: outreach and extension services for the rural disabled through the camps. *Comprehensive Rehabilitation*: NIOH works through a team to cater to individual situations and contexts.

**Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped, Mumbai.**

Regional centres at Calcutta, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Ministry of Welfare. Objectives: (a) to reach out to 3.02 million hearing impaired; (b) to train 50,000 required teachers; (c) organise training through degree courses, e.g., BSc. in audiology and speech therapy and BED special education for the deaf; (d) short term training programmes to acquaint professionals with aspects of hearing impairment; (e) custom ear mould making and hearing aid repairs; (f) refresher courses for the educators of the deaf, speech and hearing experts; (g) orientation programmes for ENT specialists, GP's, social workers, regular teachers; and (h) workshops, symposia and seminars for professionals and parents. Research is major concern of the institute. Clinical, therapeutic and educational services are also provided for the hearing handicapped.



National Creche Fund (NCF), Department of Women and Child Development, GOI, Jeevan Deep Building, New Delhi 110001.

This creche fund provides assistance to voluntary organisation and state governments to run creches throughout the country. The creches are for children between birth to five years to provide: (i) day care services; (ii) supplementary nutrition; (iii) immunization; (iv) medical and health care; and (v) recreational facilities. NCF also promotes a movement to motivate individuals to donate funds for providing child care services as 8,00,000 creches are required to meet the needs of children with working mothers. A single contribution of Rs 30,000 can take care of 25 children at a creche centre.

Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi 110002.

ICCW was established in 1952 to work as a national voluntary organisation to strive for the optimal growth of children. The council now has 28 state branches. The aims are: (i) initiating and undertaking child welfare services in India; (ii) promoting enactment of legislation and reforms for the benefit of children; (iii) organising training schemes, orientation courses and refresher courses; (iv) organising conferences, seminars related to child welfare; and (v) cooperating and collaborating with government and other agencies to meet the needs of children.

Some of the programmes of ICCW are: (i) national awards for bravery for children; (ii) training grassroot level workers for anganwadi and creche; (iii) centres for preschool training in tribal areas; and (iv) adoption: recognised by the Supreme Court for intra-country and inter-country adoption.

Centre for Environment Education (CEE), Thatlej Tekra, Ahmedabad 380054.

CEE, set up in 1984, is supported by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, GOI, in association with the Nehru Foundation for Development. The objectives are: (a) creating an awareness among children, youth and decision-makers about the environment, conservation of nature and natural resources; and (b) enhancing knowledge about all aspects of the environment. The major thrust of CEE is: (i) environment education in schools; (ii) interpretation; (iii) training; and (iv) eco-development. CEE develops innovative programmes and educational material. These are field tested for their validity and effectiveness. The centre has regional cells in Bangalore and Guwahati.

Centre for Learning Resources (CLR), 8 Deccan College Road, Behind B.K. Apartments, Yerawada, Pune 411006.

The CLR provides a variety of services to schools and non formal educational programmes for children. Its objective is to introduce educational innovation and change at the basic classroom level. CLR provides in-service training to teachers and trainers and develops low cost, innovative instructional materials in various curricular areas, including audio-visual materials for environmental education. The organisers and staff provide both learning materials to all regions and serve as a resource for training to enrich educational procedures.

Parents Forum for Meaningful Education (PFME), A-21, Swasthya Vihar, New Delhi 110092.

PFME enables concerned parents to intervene in the area of real education for children. Children's education suffers from a deep malaise—deficient textbooks, inadequate curriculum, inefficient teaching—leading to a proliferation of expensive coaching classes and guide books. There is a lack of laboratory and library facilities and above all a decayed examination system. PFME aims to improve the education system at all levels through: (i) mobilisation of public opinion through seminars, symposia, workshops, lectures and group discussions; (ii) publication of articles, newsletters and monographs promoting a pedagogically sound basis for meaningful education; and (iii) enrolment of members to promote greater interaction between the parents, teachers and students.

Madras Dyslexia Association (MDA), 10/1, Sambasivam Street, T. Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

This voluntary organisation helps people overcome learning disabilities such as the inability to spell, read and retain a sequential verbal thinking order. Its main objective is to reach out to parents and act as a support by bringing together people with similar constraints and limitations. MDA helps to start new centres in different cities, edits a newsletter and reaches out to the decision-makers to address the difficulties of the learning disabled. It organises the training of teachers with other leading organisations.

Samadhan, J-32, South Extension, New Delhi 110049.

Samadhan offers opportunities to maximise the potential of children with mental handicap through early intervention and helping parents bring up infants and preschool children with specially designed intensive stimulation programmes.

Services available: (i) early intervention centre; (ii) home based programme; and (iii) long distance education. Samadhan works with parent groups, advising on several aspects of how to help children with special needs through (a) a child guidance centre; (b) a special school working for mentally handicapped children; (c) paediatric departments of hospitals; (d) a parent's association; and the (e) local or regional office of the National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped.

Jan Madhyam, 148, Zamrudpur, New Delhi 110048.

Jan Madhyam reaches out to children with disability, but more specifically to children with learning disability and intellectual disabilities.

Jan Madhyam focuses on: (i) remedial work with mentally retarded children using games, songs, puppets, besides the plastic arts; (ii) vocational training and rehabilitation of children with mixed abilities to prepare children to manage basic needs like cooking, personal hygiene, first aid and crisis management, be economically productive, as also socially and emotionally integrated; (iii) training people to work with the handicapped through workshop sessions; and (iv) spreading awareness about disability.

#### Counselling and Therapy

Large families, an open neighbourhood, flexibility in child rearing within structured frames provided natural therapy necessary for interpersonal relationships. However, nuclear families, secluded urban living and rigid disciplinary codes have necessitated out of family support. Professional support is available for families, individuals and children at several places: (i) counselling services at hospitals; (ii) private counsellors and psychiatrists; and (iii) school counsellors. There are services and organisations which reach people in distress through individual or group sessions. They also run newsletters and provide services like training individuals.

In Delhi, counselling for children, families and also home training programme for children with disabilities is available at Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Child Study Centre, Lady Irwin College, National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development, The Spastic Society of Northern India, and Sanjeevani.

Indian Association of Preschool Education (IAPE), SNDT University, Mumbai.

A registered voluntary organisation working through state level organisations to enrich the pre-school child's environment. Its various activities are:

(i) newsletter for teachers and parents; (ii) organising conferences to familiarise teachers with innovative modes and materials in working with young children; (iii) enhancing awareness about preschool children; and (iv) organising workshops, seminars, and lecture demonstrations.

Bal Bhavan, Kotla Marg, New Delhi 110002.

Conceptualised in the early fifties for the education and recreation of refugee children, the Bal Bhavan movement in its present form was established in 1956. This educational recreational programme is fully supported by the Government of India through the department of education. This venture has the potential for enhancing children's creativity. Bal Bhavan centres exist all over the country. The Delhi centre has a multiple range of activities where children can explore, experiment and create in several media like the plastic arts, performing arts, science and photography. The institution has established a science park, children's museum and a library. The staff comprises of skilled craftsmen and artistes with special talent to work with children.

Theatre in Education (Rangoli) The National School of Drama (NSD), Bhawalpur House, New Delhi 110001.

At the NSD a theatre in education company was established with the financial support of the Department of Education. Its objectives are: (i) to provide theatre opportunities for children to enhance their creative potential; (ii) conduct workshops for teachers to work creatively with children; and (iii) produce plays, theatre games and exercises to generate child oriented methods for interactions.

TIE produces plays for children on a regular basis and uses several intervention techniques to increase audience participation. On invitation the company visits other cities with its productions and conducts workshops with teachers and parents through the school system.

Traffic Parks for Children, Baba Kharak Singh Marg, Punjabi Bagh and Pragati Maidan, all in Delhi.

A venture of the Delhi traffic police, this programme familiarises children with traffic lights, crossings and road signs. These parks have existed for long, yet their use is limited because few know of their existence. There is also a paucity of operating vehicles. This is a fun place for children to experience being in simulated settings.

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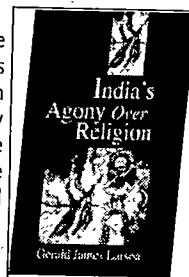
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# Communication

WHEN I read the essay, 'The Hindu view of a multi-religious society' by Swami Agnivesh, reproduced in *Seminar* (December 1997) from *Communalism Combat*, I was so impressed and moved that I rang up Swami Agnivesh and told him so. He was pleased, but said, sadly, that it had brought charges against him of being communal and inciting communal hatred.

Astounded, I re-read his piece and the reactions (in *Communalism Combat*). Frankly, I was dismayed by the subjectivity in each of the critical reactions. Not one of them has looked at the totality or the context of his argument. I am left with the impression that Agnivesh has struck where it hurts and the response has been reactive – either emotional or then evasive, hair-splitting and extraneous.

To accuse Agnivesh of being in the VHP mould because he talks about the rise of Hindu fundamentalism as a reaction to national and international Muslim fundamentalism, or that Hindus have their reservations against proselytizing faiths, or that both Christianity and Islam advocate, in their holy books, the missionary command, is escapism.

Being of a minority community, an ex-communist, I laud Swami Agnivesh's bold attempt to take the bull by the horns, abjure goody-goodyism and call a spade a spade – whether about Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. He has been unsparingly critical of each, where it has violated basic human rights and his call for rising above scripture in the quest for truth takes courage from a man of the cloth.

That there are profound differences between paganism and religions of the book can hardly be gained. That the latter have, historically and essentially, regarded the former with repugnance as satanic and to be overcome by all means, is a fact not totally in abeyance even today. That the innumerable invasions, wars and bloody massacres in history in the name of God, were as much about the conquest of territory and people as about saving souls and destroying the heathen, is also undeniable.

As long as any sacred book is propagated as the immutable and infallible word of God the children of all other gods (and goddesses) will continue to be regarded dubiously and with mistrust if not with hatred or contempt. This is the context in which fears of the missionary command must be situated – and not speciously dismissed as a denial of religious choice.

Whatever the momentary or even, in cases, sustained syncretism over the millennia, the fact that Hinduism and Hindus (for want of a more accurate nomenclature) were the victims of a thousand years of conquest by people(s) of the book(s) who, overwhelmingly, found them repugnant in their beliefs and practices has, indeed, left scars. These will not heal by merely wishing the truth away and whitewashing what happened over the centuries in the banalities of *bhai-bhaism*. For in truth, not only have all the major religions given rise periodically to the most dreadful practices in their name, but each has its own strengths and its own weaknesses and contradictions which have given rise to manifold odious interpretations as well.

As Agnivesh points out, to negate or suppress things, especially such that are also embedded in history and in memory, can explode in the hysteria and horror of what demagogues like Hitler could accomplish. That we have such potential here is surely borne out by the events of December 1992 and November 1984.

Locating the quest for truth above the written word underlines a value which, as Swamiji says, can be upheld and secured only by a secular order. Whether or not the time, even today and at least in our country, is ripe for genuine, fearless inter-religious dialogue is doubtful. Given the response to Agnivesh's endeavour, I would say, not yet. Even at the 'university' level and among 'professionals' there is, clearly, too much defensiveness and too little courage.

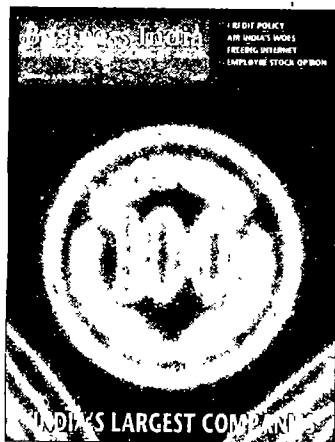
If at least some people in the business could be so bold as to take Agnivesh's example and declare against the obvious infirmities contained in their own, as well as other, scriptures by virtue of their place in time if nothing else; if these 'professionals' could agree that scripture and practice and interpretation are dynamic and subject to change when the times warrant it; if they could, (hail the day) agree that there are, indubitably, certain crass proclamations and pronouncements in the (otherwise) lofty scriptures of all creeds, which violate fundamental human rights and must be cast out; if this were possible then, indeed, we might begin a process of socio-spiritual dialogue and renewal. As things stand, I fear that Agnivesh is crying in the wilderness.

Incidentally, minorities in Pakistan may have their personal laws but their official status is second class and they are restricted by law to a communal vote. That is, if they have not been excommunicated for their beliefs.

**Primila Lewis, New Delhi**

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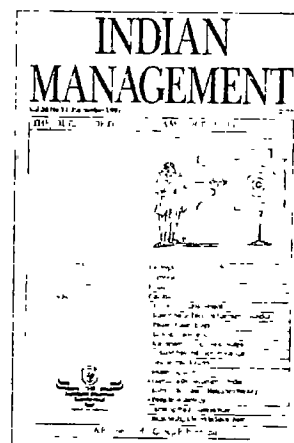
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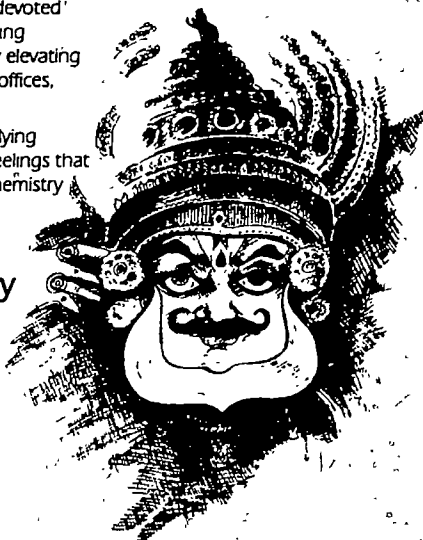
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# Comment

## Perils of manufactured 'popularity'

MANY journalists, political commentators and a large section of the urban middle class seem to be convinced that Atal Behari Vajpayee will be the next prime minister. There has been a rush from the Congress and Janata Dal, and thus the possibility of the BJP entering into fruitful alliances with breakaway groups of the Congress and JD. The BJP has succeeded in roping in Jayalalitha. These developments have contributed to the euphoria of the BJP, raising the possibility of the party ultimately realising its dream of ruling at the centre. Even commentators generally perceived to be critical of the BJP are hastening to discover its virtues. It is being eulogised as a suitable candidate to occupy the space vacated by the marginalisation, if not liquidation, of the Congress. The psephologists are predicting a comfortable majority for the BJP and its allies in the next Lok Sabha. More interesting is a pre-poll survey conducted by 'C-voter', an agency of unknown credentials, which simultaneously released its fantastic findings to a couple of national dailies predicting a 'wave' in the BJP's favour.

A crucial component of this media hype is the skilful attempt to 'promote' Vajpayee as a celebrity –

even as a product. In colourful sponsored supplements, he is being promoted as the 'man India awaits'. Leading authors have called him 'handsome', well-known fashion designers are eager to outfit him in designer kurta pyjamas for campaigning, and composers are vying to provide melodies for his poems. The attempts to promote Vajpayee as a commercial product, and to reduce the elections to single point affairs, are obviously coterminous. The handsomeness of the PM seems more important than the issues, image management more crucial than ideological positions, and political power more important than the political process itself. The most *Bharatiya* of all our political parties is most comfortable with this all-American style of campaigning. The so-called value based politics of the BJP has unwittingly exposed itself for what it is: the politics of images!

In this context, the statement by Atal Behari Vajpayee (Star News, 21st December) is extremely significant. According to him, 'there is no essential difference of opinion among political parties on issues like poverty – the difference is only regarding the implementation of policies.' If a commonality of concern

about poverty was meant no one would quibble. The point, however, is that the policies which are sought to be 'implemented' are rooted in certain conceptual frameworks, and elections provide the voter with an opportunity to indicate preferences about contesting conceptual frameworks.

Atalji is too seasoned a politician not to appreciate such a basic point. The import of his apparently simplistic statement is that it epitomises the BJP's strategy for the coming elections: to reduce the election to the one and only issue of 'stability'; and to correspondingly promote Vajpayee – the genial '*Mukhota*' (to borrow the very apt description from Govindacharya) of the BJP as a commodity in an attractive package. This is quite natural from the BJP point of view, as it sees the present historical juncture as a 'now or never' opportunity to catapult itself to power. The idea is to flaunt the USP of stability with such fanfare that all questions of social politics and political morality are drowned in its din – at least for the time being. The BJP hopes to appeal to an electorate, which according to its assessment is quite exasperated at the fate of the UF government.

But the astute strategists of the BJP – unlike its imbecile enthusiasts among the journalist community – are also aware of its critical limitations in terms of social base and geographical spread in the country. Hence the 'pragmatic idealism' (duly approved by the RSS) of entering into all kinds of alliances. This has led to a peculiar situation where the BJP advances precisely the same argument in defence of Jayalalitha which it refused to accept in the case of Laloo Prasad Yadav. More interesting are its attempts to woo the Muslims, Dalits and women in order to drastically refurbish its image.

These attempts, incidentally, are a forced tribute to the nature of the Indian polity, which by its pluralistic nature ensures the isolation of those who depend on the politics of exclusion. Having reached the zenith of its political mobilisation, aimed exclusively at its chosen base, any political formation must either remain content with a regional or a specific caste/or community identity. Should it wish to rule at the centre, it has to look for allies with different social and regional bases. The Congress was unique because of its historical legacy. It simultaneously functioned as a political party and as a coalition of various social/regional interests. It started to lose its dexterity of maintaining this fine balance in Indira Gandhi's latter years. The results are there for everyone to see.

The BJP, with its hitherto exclusionist policies, will have to accept a political destiny essentially simi-

lar to that of the DMK or the Akalis. It has chosen to outgrow itself and yet it is virtually non-existent in south and east India. Impatient with gradual growth, it is forcing the pace through various social and political alliances.

Setting aside our own assessment of the BJP's political praxis, let us objectively consider its electoral prospects. In the last Lok Sabha the BJP did not win a single seat of the 145 in the eastern belt from Bengal to Tamil Nadu. It had only one in the entire North East. In spite of its tall claims of being Bharatiya, the BJP has done little more than open its account in the south and in the east beyond Bihar. It is no surprise that the party is seeking alliances in these areas with whomsoever is willing.

The trouble, purely from an electoral point of view, is that the popularity of these new allies is yet to be tested; so is their fidelity to a 'stable government under an able leader.' Mamata Banerjee and Lakshmi Parvati have their own compulsions and designs; so has the BJD in Orissa. The BJP cannot hope to make any tangible gains for itself in Tamil Nadu, though it can claim that it now has the support of a Dravida party. The problem, however, is that with this psychological advantage the BJP has sacrificed its moral stance on corruption – one of its favourite issues. It is not certain that the kind of 'stability' which the BJP is projecting as its USP has the expected mass appeal in areas which are crucial for its expansion. In the numbers game, the BJP can expect gains only in Orissa and Karnataka, which ironically could be balanced by losses in Haryana and south Bihar.

In fact, a fundamental presupposition in the euphoria surrounding the BJP has been the decay of the Congress. But in politics things change very quickly. It has taken only a fortnight of Sonia Gandhi's active involvement in the election campaign to galvanise her party and to put the process of desertions from the Congress into reverse gear. Even before that, no leader with a real mass base (Mamata being the only exception) had deserted the Congress.

More importantly, no OBC leader of any consequence has defected to the BJP. Balram Singh Yadav deserted the Congress only to make up with his old adversary – Mulayam Singh Yadav. The import of this fact cannot be ignored; in the Hindi heartland, where the social politics of caste groups is now being vocally articulated in party politics, the BJP is considered to be a party of the upper castes.

It is socially significant that the Samata Party (a Kurmi party in caste terms) has chosen to underline its

'serious differences' with the BJP on issues like uniform civil code, Ayodhya and the alliance with Jayalalitha. It is but natural that the Samata Party is keen to distance itself from the political agenda of the BJP which is rooted in the upper caste imagination of the Indian nation. Besides the task of expansion, the BJP also faces the challenge of maintaining its present numerical strength which is under serious threat, at least in Maharashtra. An alliance, or even a tacit understanding among the Congress, SP and RPI is capable of influencing the verdict in at least 10 out of 33 seats won by the BJP-SS combine last time.

The potential impact of such an understanding has not been lost on Bal Thackeray. His generous suggestion of constructing a national monument in Ayodhya and to put the 'damn thing' at rest must be viewed in this context. Overall, the BJP strategists are not unaware that the issue of stability can ensure only limited results. The forthcoming election does not show signs of throwing up a single issue capable of capturing the imagination of all segments of society. In fact, stability *à la* the BJP is perceived by many as referring to the fears and fantasies of those who see the 'nation' only as a euphemism for their own power interests and egocentric selves.

In the parlance of the elite and the middle class, 'national integration' instead of referring to a genuinely participative process leading to the empowerment of hitherto marginalised groups has come to signify their appropriation into an unjust order of political economy. Unfortunately for the BJP and its supporters, the marginalised groups have already reached a certain degree of political articulation and have seen through the rhetoric of stability. That is why the BSP can rather provocatively declare 'political instability' as most suitable for the empowerment of Dalit Bahujans. To the BSP, Election '98 is an opportunity for ensuring a political dispensation which is perforce more actively sensitive to Dalit self assertion.

The coming polls are unlikely to witness a wave cutting across given loyalties, or giving an upper hand to any particular slogan. Most likely it will be a repeat of the 1989 elections, when the most hyped issue of corruption failed to deliver a majority for any party. Given all this, the BJP and its allies cannot realistically hope for more than 200 seats in the next Lok Sabha.

In fact, it is an awareness of this prospect which informs the BJP (or rather the RSS) strategy of creating a sponsored media hype in its favour. It aims to generate what can be described as a *media simulated voting pattern* (MSVP) to make up for the lack of genuine

enthusiasm for the BJP among ordinary people. How far this strategy of MSVP will succeed remains to be seen.

So far as the much trumpeted 'change of heart' in the BJP is concerned, we must consider the all important role of the RSS, which is deliberately downplayed by supporters of the BJP and naively ignored by professional commentators. The RSS is absolutely correct in calling itself a cultural organisation because it attributes to itself a cultural project distinct from the merely political. In its vocabulary the political signifies only the everyday details of parliamentary and extra parliamentary politics, while the cultural signifies a comprehensive agenda for the creation of a *controlled space* for the exercise of immediate political options. In other words, the 'culture' of the RSS refers to social politics—as distinct from party politics—and to the discourse of power at the social plane.

The BJP is a devoted member of the Sangh Parivar to whom has been assigned the task of creating the space in party politics for the long-term political project of the RSS. Any genuine 'change of heart' in the BJP has to necessarily emanate from the RSS, which has repeatedly refused to either democratise itself or to genuinely internalise the virtues of plurality. The RSS could have played a positive role if only it had devoted itself to the creative evolution of pluralistic Indic traditions. But the *raison de etre* of the RSS has been to appropriate Hindu traditions and symbols in order to create an Indian variant of an aggressive and sectarian nationalism of the Nazi type. The RSS represents neither the Hindu view of life nor the broader Indian culture—it only articulates the fears and fantasies of the upper castes in a culturally alien idiom. Naturally therefore, it only seeks to appropriate the aspirations of the marginalised sections of the Hindu community to its own fantasy of a Hindu Rashtra.

The Sangh Parivar must make its social base genuinely responsive to the need of empowering the marginalised groups as a matter of right. It has to internalise the traditional Indian ethos of pluralism. Without this change, a 'shift' in the BJP's position is only a politically expedient projection. It may bear fruit in the short run, but will push it into a situation of trading its traditional support for yet uncertain expansion. The BJP may end up like the father and son in the well known fable of Aesop who end up making a fool of themselves in their attempts to please everyone, just as a matter of expediency.

# Backpage

IT is a marker of the times that the fiftieth *barsi* of our Martyr's Day is likely to pass without much notice. 30 January 1948, as many of our countrymen seem to have forgotten, was the fateful day when Mohandas Gandhi, the Mahatma and the Father of the Nation, fell to the bullets of a Hindu fanatic. Not the first, but by far the most significant sacrifice to the cause of inter-communal amity. His crime: insisting that our government pay off our dues to Pakistan.

In the run-up to the forthcoming elections – one admittedly bereft of significant policy debate but suffused with empty sloganeering of secularism, sacrifice and swaraj, the relative neglect of the Mahatma is surprising. Particularly since Gandhi, as complex a personality as we are ever likely to encounter, has been more than others subjected to varying and sectional use (and abuse).

The Congress, a party which most often claims monopoly over his legacy, is so excited by the eventual acceding by Sonia Gandhi to function as star campaigner that the only sacrifice it can recall is of the Nehru-Gandhi mother and son. Without for a moment downplaying the tragedy of their assassinations, it is worth recalling that both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi became victims of their realpolitik. One paid for the 'assault' on the Golden Temple; the other for the Indo-Lanka Accord and the decision to embroil the Indian Army into the Sri Lankan ethnic cauldron. Not quite issues of principle.

In an electoral fray marked by unprincipled alliances to keep the BJP out of power, not holding out Gandhi as our ultimate symbol of secularism is a serious flaw. Our secularists seem to recall him only when their 'other', the BJP seeks to incorporate him in their pantheon of greats, gleefully pointing out that it was a Hindu extremist who was responsible for his assassination. Rarely do they bother to point to his innovation of adding *Ishwar Allah Tero Naam* to the *Tulsidas Ram dhun Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram*. Or that this was one innovation which received ready acceptance in popular culture; that it became the inspiration of one of the most popular bhajans to come out of Bollywood *Allah Tero Naam, Ishwar Tero Naam; Sabko Sanmati De Bhagwan*. No better example of our syncretic cultural traditions, and yet, even our cultural activists would rather iconise Kabir.

Gandhi's legacy of *swaraj* presents greater problems, more so in these days of unbridled consumerism, preferably with western goodies. His slogan of keeping all his windows open, yet remaining firm on his feet, has at best been read as reworking our reforms package while keeping domestic industry (read industrialists) satisfied. Not austerity, not self-reliance, not building upon domestic creativity and innovation, and not, definitely not doing the right thing by the poor. *Garibi Hatao* worked in 1971. Today the focus is on becoming rich.

One would have thought that given our penchant for anniversaries, 1998 would be the year of Gandhi. Are we not still celebrating the golden jubilee of our Independence; and does not Gandhi legitimately claim his place in our memory? Surely, it could not all be due to his unswerving emphasis on service, his refrain that the Congress party disband itself after Independence. Or to his scepticism about narrow nationalism and the state. The last, given the middle class obsession with stability, another popular electoral slogan, is today a virtual anathema. In a polity marked most by the objective of 'victory at any cost', principles do not stand much of a chance.

It is not our plea that our greats, even one as significant as Gandhi, need to be eulogised, that all writing should be hagiographic. Or that succeeding generations do not, should not, focus on new personalities as their favoured symbols. But if the response to the recently staged play *Gandhi vs Mahatma* is any indication, it is feasible to present the man critically but sympathetically. His 'failures' and his warts, particularly with his family, only add to his believability. After all, do we not owe gratitude to a man who consciously eschewed the building up of a dynasty, much as we might sympathise with Harilal.

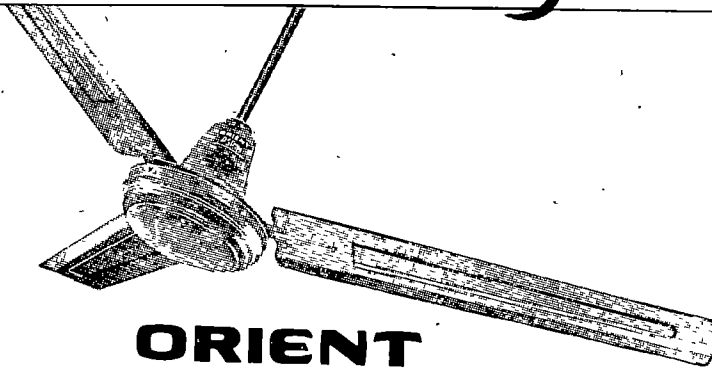
More than Vajpayee, 'the man India awaits', and Sonia Gandhi as the 'courageous queen' willing to shoulder the responsibility of leading her bereft subjects, the original Gandhi comes across as a more fitting candidate for the times. Since these elections are more likely to be fought around symbols and slogans than substance, our image makers would do well to re-examine their favoured constructs.

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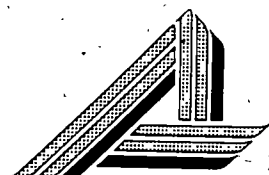
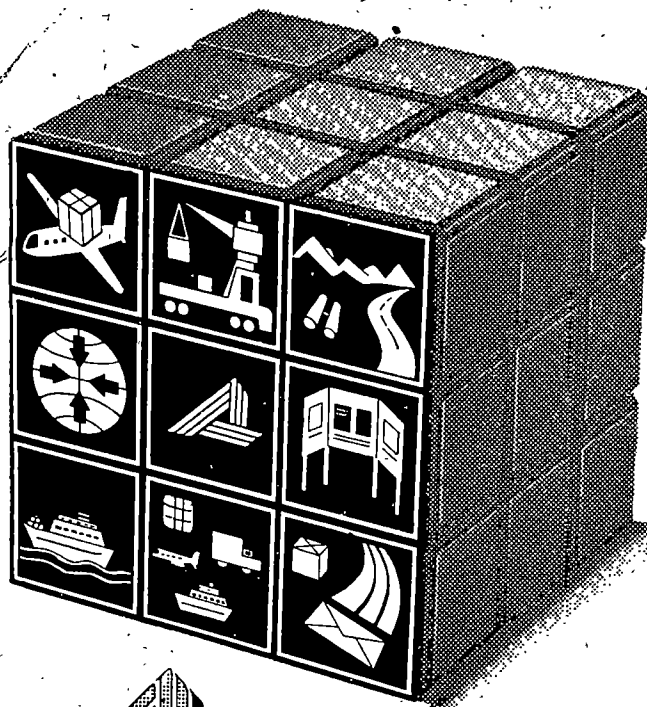
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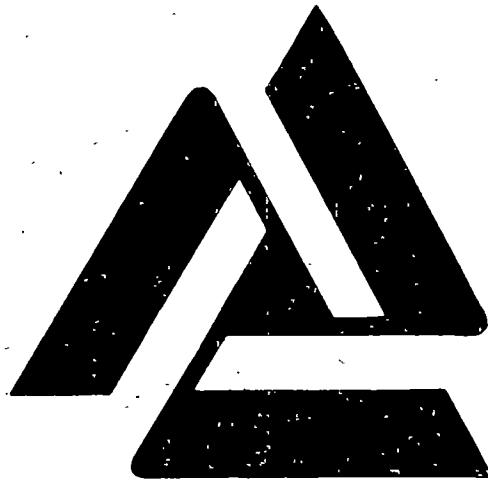
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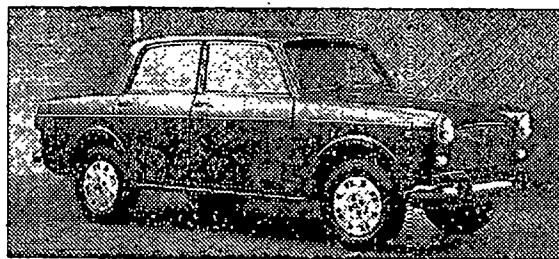
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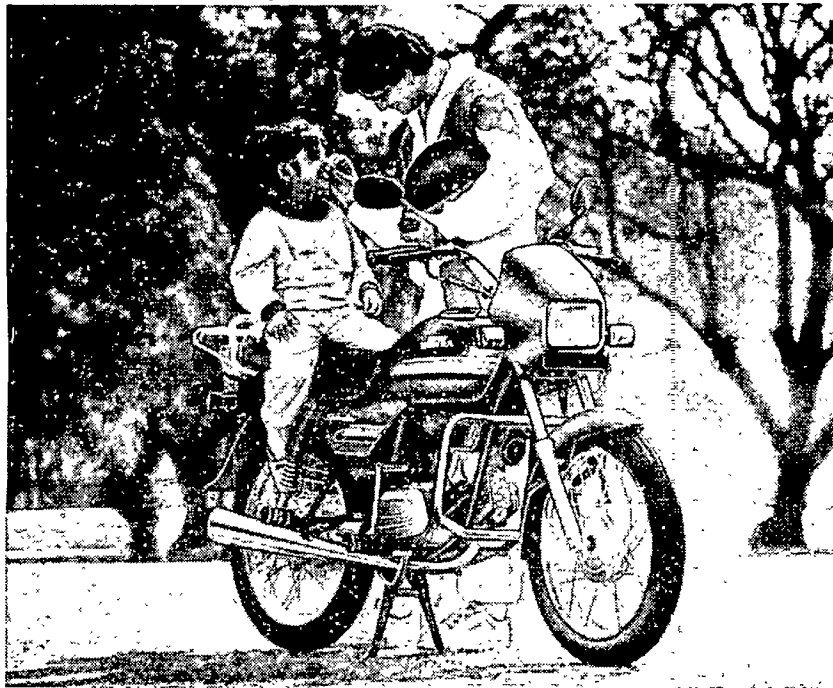
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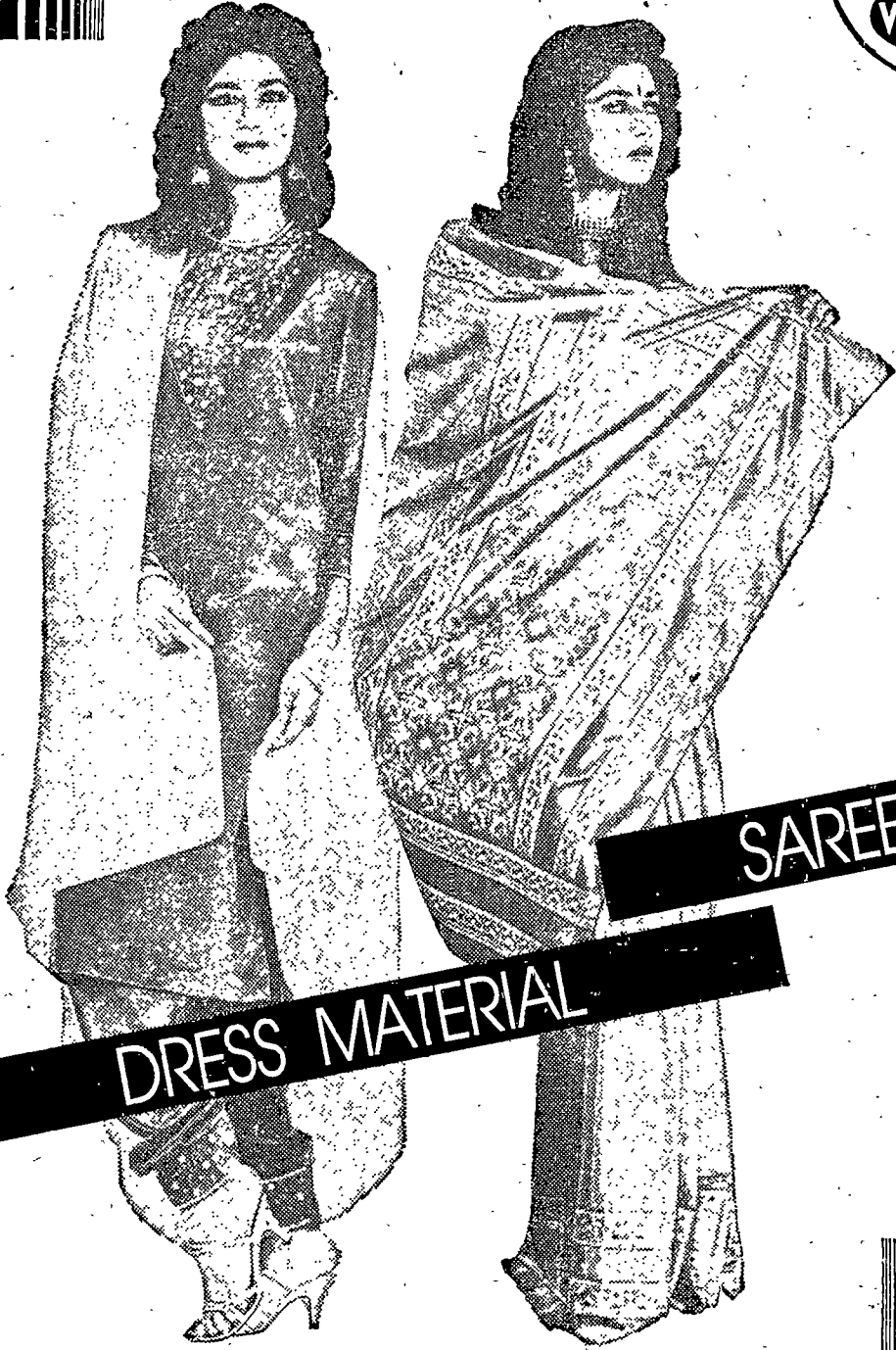
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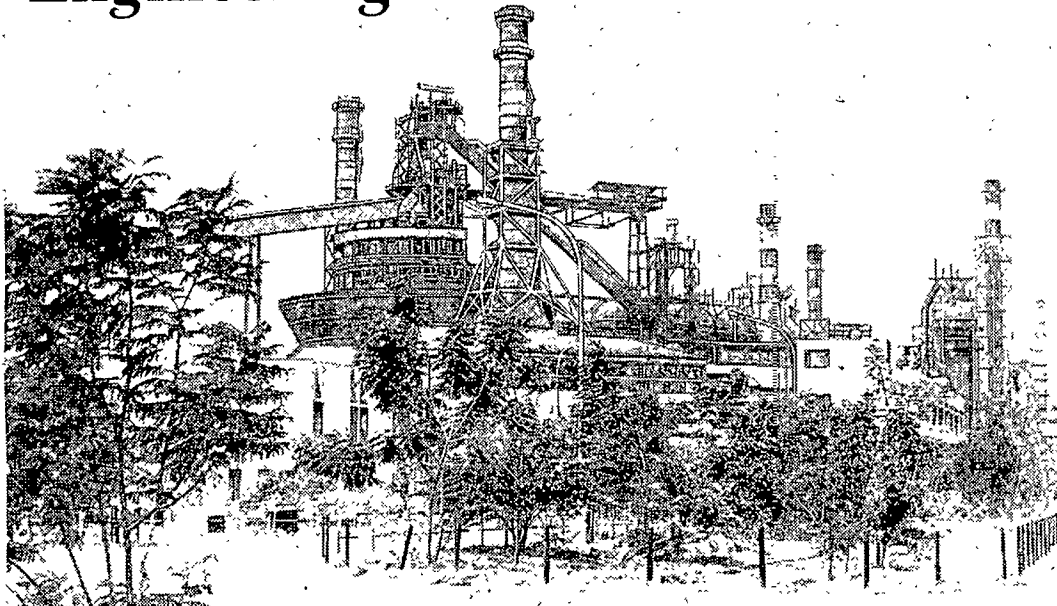
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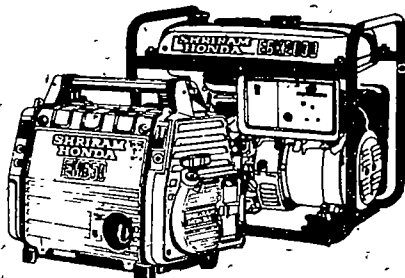
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# 463

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symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
Posed by Ravi Nair, Director, South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, Delhi
- 14 **WHO IS A REFUGEE?**  
Radha Kumar, policy analyst and author, Delhi; former Executive Director of the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly
- 18 **IN INTERNATIONAL LAW**  
B.S. Chimni, Associate Professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- 23 **REFUGEES AND HUMAN RIGHTS**  
Brian Gorlick, Barrister and Solicitor, Ontario, Canada; presently, Legal Officer, UNHCR, Delhi
- 28 **HAVING LOST OUR HOMELAND**  
Ahilan Arulanathan, doctoral student, Yale Law School, USA; and Elizabeth van Schaak, lawyer, International Criminal Court on the former Yugoslavia, The Hague, Netherlands
- 34 **SURVIVAL DIGNITY AND DEMOCRACY**  
Catherine Moller, graduate student, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, Princeton, USA
- 41 **PEOPLE WITHOUT A COUNTRY**  
Nathan A. Limpert, student of law, Yale University, New Haven, USA
- 49 **STATELESS IN SOUTH ASIA**  
Sumit Sen, doctoral student of political science, London School of Economics, London, UK
- 55 **PROVIDING REFUGE**  
Arundhati Ghose, former Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva
- 58 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by Anindita Mukhopadhyay, Harsh Sethi, Seminarist, Suhas Chakma and Hiranmay Karlekar
- 69 **FURTHER READING**  
A select and relevant bibliography compiled by Suhas Chakma, SAHRDC, Delhi
- 71 **COMMUNICATIONS**  
Received from Urvashi Butalia, Delhi, Nikhila Haritsa, Bangalore and Arvind Sharma, Montreal
- 75 **IN MEMORIAM**  
S. Guhan 1933-98
- 78 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdliury

## The problem

THE Government of India presently sits on the executive committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It has not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its Additional Protocol of 1967. India rightly holds that the 1951 Convention and its Additional Protocol does not relate to the situation prevalent in South Asia or for that matter in much of the developing world. The existing convention is based on a legal regime of individual determination of refugee claims. India and its neighbours deal with negligible claims at an individual level. Refugee flows into this area have been mass exoduses of people fleeing civil war and internal conflict. Clearly, there is a case for re-visiting the convention.

India, however, is hamstrung by an absence of a domestic legal regime to address refugee concerns. At one level, it claims not to have given full status to the office of the UNHCR in India and has recently given marching orders to UNHCR's Chief of Mission in New Delhi. UNHCR has no access to Burmese or Bhutanese refugees in the North East. It also does not have access to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in the camps in Tamil Nadu. It supports a mere 2500 urban refugees in India getting a lot of undue political mileage in the process,

thanks in the main to Government of India's failure to create a domestic legal regime for refugees. The government, which often cries itself hoarse on intrusiveness on sovereignty issues, allows refugee determinations to take place by UNHCR for urban refugees in New Delhi. UNHCR is not accountable to any legal mechanisms, national or international. Its refugee determination procedures allow for no legal challenge outside its own portals. It does not allow legal representation for the refugee, and like old Furry in Alice in Wonderland proclaims, 'I'll be Judge, I'll be Jury.'

At another level, the Government of India is tying itself in legal knots in attempting to extradite Rongthong Kunley Dorji, the Bhutanese leader in exile. It holds LTTE suspects in special detention camps under procedures that amount to administrative detention and deports Chin refugees from Burma without even the modicum of a legal procedure. The situation is one in which adhocism reigns supreme, where neither government nor public opinion is aware of the crucial difference between political refugee and economic migrant.

Globally, UNHCR is dismantling its basic tenet of providing protection to refugees. It has slowly con-



verted itself into an emergency relief organisation. UNHCR cannot tilt at Schengen and Fortress Europe, so it is easier to play inter-governmental Mother Teresa distributing blankets, tents and rice. At another level, it waves the big stick of international accountability at countries like Rwanda and the former Zaire. Yet it meows like a cat when the United States and Italy interdict Haitian and Albanian refugees on the high seas, or allows France to refoul refugees through a shotgun legal process.

The 1951 Convention is a sacred cow. Nobody wants to rewrite it, claiming that there is no minimum political consensus. Yet, at the same time, UNHCR is trying to expand its mandate to cover internally displaced people, an issue that presently lies under the purview of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) under the Geneva Conventions. In spite of a mandate to address the issue of statelessness, it has taken an ostrich-like attitude to the issue of stateless peoples in Arunachal Pradesh in India or among the hill tribes in Northern Thailand, to name only two Asian situations.

With the international protection regime for refugees clearly inadequate, one way forward would be to

increasingly rely on existing human rights mechanisms. UNHCR is loathe to admit that it has in effect given up on protection itself. The UN human rights bureaucracy does not want to be seen treading on what has traditionally been UNHCR territory. The challenge is to question these shibboleths.

An ad hoc legal regime at the domestic level, a withering away of the protection mandate of UNHCR at the international level, new refugee control mechanisms at the national level – like sanctions on carriers and tighter visa controls – is leading to greater illegal and irregular movement of refugees. All adding up. The refugee, a person in distress, often finds himself fleeing persecution from his country, jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

This issue of *Seminar* brings together case studies of ground level situations and politico-legal analyses of the refugee regime in an effort to focus attention on a situation most often shrouded in secrecy. We, who proudly boast of a heritage of *Vasudev Kutumbakam*, need to ponder over this. Otherwise we should be prepared to shed such claims.

RAVI NAIR

# Who is a refugee?

RADHA KUMAR

WHO is a refugee? Conventionally, a refugee is a person who is driven from his or her native land by violence or deprivation, for being a member of a hated community, race, sect or ethnos, or by virtue of political opinion.<sup>1</sup> The category, however, lumps together people who are very differently treated, not only by their persecutors but by their new hosts. There is a difference between persecution on ideological rather than biological grounds. Thus, for example, until the end of the Cold War, groups who were made refugee by totalitarian regimes or in the course of an ideological conflict were accorded a better reception than groups who were expelled for race, religion or language.

And while there was always some distinction made by the influential host countries between who was persecuted for what – the classic example of relatively favoured ideological refugees being the Cubans in the US, and the classic example of

relatively ill-treated refugees being the 'boat people' from Vietnam – even the British felt free to forcibly return Vietnamese refugees (sheltering in Hong Kong) only after the Cold War ended. (Incidentally, the first country to deport Vietnamese refugees was the newly democratic Czechoslovakia in 1990-1). To this extent the disintegration of the Cold War released countries from conforming to even the cynical ethics which it imposed, for the ideological compulsion to offer sanctuary to an enemy's enemy disappeared.

If there is a difference between persecution on ideological rather than biological grounds, there is an even greater difference between the exiled individual and the individual expelled together with a community. The popular image of the refugee is of a poor, half-starved, generally Asian or African victim of a tyrannical or Third World state. Until recently, it was taken for granted that there was and would be a steady but largely manageable stream of refugees of this kind, but that the great refugee exoduses were created by inter-state or large-scale wars.

This assumption was made partly because the refugee was defined at the end of World War II, when there were an estimated 30 million refugees in

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1. A refugee is a person who, 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.' (1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

Europe. At the time, it was assumed that such large numbers of outcasts would only be seen again if there was a third world war. Less than 50 years later, however, it is the collapse of the Cold War which is marked by an astounding rise in refugee figures, albeit yet to rival the World War II scale. In 1992, there were 16.4 million refugees and 23.7 million internally displaced people. As against this, there were 9.7 million refugees and 5 million internally displaced in 1969, and 7.7 million refugees in 1982 (no figures for internally displaced people are given).<sup>2</sup> In 1993, the UNHCR estimated that one out of every 130 persons in world population was a refugee. By 1997, this figure had grown to one out of every 120 persons.<sup>3</sup>

**C**oncern over an increasing flow of refugees was initially voiced after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989; Europe's gates, its richer western parts feared, would be flooded by economic and political migrants from the East. As the East rapidly reconstellated, however, and conflict erupted in the former Yugoslavia, the Trans-Dniester, the Transcaucasus and Transylvania, attention shifted to ethnic and communal wars as the chief causes of contemporary refugee flight. In 1991 the Pentagon issued a paper arguing that the threat of 'new conflicts' in the East and South required new forms of intervention. The new conflicts, it said, would appear as protracted low intensity wars which would not confine themselves within state borders; on the contrary, they were wars which targeted civilians and created massive

refugee movements which could destabilize a widening circle of countries and regions.

**T**he term which was increasingly used to describe what fuelled these wars was 'ethnic nationalism'. Initially, an *ethnie* was broadly construed as a community which collectively defined itself by language, custom, religion, race or culture; ethnic nationalists asserted the primacy of ethnic identities in creating nation states or governing them. In this sense, ethnic nationalism could be defined as qualitatively different from either the European nationalism of the 19th century or the anti-colonial nationalism of the 20th century: while the latter two inclined to egalitarianism and based themselves on citizenship, the former was hierarchical and placed collective rights above individual ones.<sup>4</sup>

However, as ethnic nationalism proliferated, it became clear that the wide definition of *ethnie* was itself problematic as far as the relationship between identity and conflict was concerned. Historically, in the drive to ethnic war, one form of ethnic identity tended to eclipse the others and that was religious identity, or, as the South Asian term will have it, communalism, i.e., ethnic conflict based on religious identity. In this context, the Yugoslav wars, based as they were not only on dissolving the federation but on redrawing its borders communally – between Sláv Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics – brought back a spectre which Europeans thought they had laid to rest, of religious conflict in Europe.

As the aims of the Serbian and Croatian political leadership to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina between them grew increasingly to dominate the wars, a bewildered Europe and the US began to re-examine images of the refugee: no longer a poor victim of a tyrannical or Third World state, but white, and a member of East Europe's most developed and liberal state; no longer a victim of large-scale interstate wars, but of protracted low intensity communal conflicts which could amount to genocide. Significantly, as the Bosnian war dragged on, television images of cosmopolitan protest, as embodied by Sarajevo's cultural elite, began to be replaced by images of bedraggled Muslim women in headscarves, gaunt peasants, and starved men in concentration camps. The point that they did not make, nor even seriously imply, was the way in which this war was eliminating an entire middle class, only a few of whom would find honourable exile as writers and artists in Western Europe and the US.

**W**ith the image of the terrible devastation wrought on intelligentsias by ideological conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War, Stalinism and China's Cultural Revolution, we have tended to misrepresent the similar destruction wrought by ethnic and communal conflicts, partly because Europe, the continent in which communalism reached its apogee in the Holocaust and the protracted demonisation of Islam, has managed to present communalism as a primitive tribal phenomenon rather than a consequential political one.

Yet one of the most damaging long-term consequences of the partition of India was the removal of almost the entire Muslim middle class to Pakistan; one of the ugliest aspects of the Bangladesh war was the deli-

2. Myron Weiner, 'Bad Neighbours, Bad Neighbourhoods', *International Security*, 21:1, Summer 1996, pp.12-17.

3. Sadako Ogata, *The State of the World's Refugees, 1993: The Challenges of Protection*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993; 'UNHCR at a Glance', AG9707b.pm5/25 July 1997.

4. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Progress, Myth, Reality*, Canto Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.164; Mary Kaldor and Radha Kumar: 'New Forms of Conflict', in *Conflicts in Europe*, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Publication Series No.7, Prague, 1993, pp.12-15.

berate targeting of the Bengali intelligentsia; one of the most tragic achievements of Israel has been its wilful oblivion – mounting to hatred – of the Palestinian intelligentsia; and one of the most grim fallouts of the Afghan war has been how its communalisation, through the US-Pakistan support for the Taliban, turned upon the expulsion of its middle class. Indeed, the extent to which Germany has been able to recover from the flight from Nazism of its intelligentsia is a moot point.

**H**ow to interpret the new emphasis on ethnic and communal conflicts is, however, debatable. While the number of ethnic conflicts has certainly grown, from 14 in 1969 to (at least) 21 in 1992,<sup>5</sup> and they now comprise over half the number of conflicts producing refugees (21 out of 36 in 1992 as against 14 out of 34 in 1969), the ratio of refugees from ethnic to non-ethnic conflicts has remained roughly the same. Refugees from ethnic and communal conflicts constituted roughly half the total number of refugees in 1969 and also in 1992.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, in sheer scale no ethnic conflict has produced the massive expulsions that the conflict in Afghanistan, which began under the Cold War, has. The largest number of refugees which the UNHCR deals with – and has dealt with for the last 17

years – is Afghan. At its peak, in 1990, the number of Afghan refugees, including internally displaced people, was over 6 million (in other words, over a third of the population).<sup>7</sup> In comparison, the peak number of Rwandan refugees in 1994 was over 2 million, and from Iraq in 1991 1.7 million, while the wars in former Yugoslavia created 1.7 million refugees.

**I**n fact, it is the 3.2 million Palestinian refugees who are second in numbers to Afghans, but because their care devolves upon a separate UN agency, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), their statistics are not generally included in the global refugee figures given by the UNHCR but are separately stated, and they appear to be under-reported by the US Committee for Refugees surveys.<sup>8</sup> The irony of this fact is further compounded by the fact that President Arafat has all but agreed to Israel's stipulation that the bulk of Palestinian refugees – especially in Lebanon – have no right to return to the Palestinian territories, but selected Palestinians in exile – including those with US citizenship, do. Who indeed, one may ask, is a refugee, when the term as applied to Palestinians acquires an ancestral meaning for some and becomes a point of difference for others?

In our time-honoured fashion, the Indian subcontinent has given the normal definition of refugee a surreal twist. Take the case of the Biharis in Bangladesh. Now, in 1998, Pakistan

is debating a tentative decision to repatriate some 250,000 Biharis who became refugee when East Bengal seceded from Pakistan. The decision was reached on the 25th anniversary of Bangladesh and the 50th anniversary of Pakistan and independent India, against the backdrop of the three-nation cricket Independence Cup tournament in Bangladesh (which received much greater coverage than the issue of the Biharis).

**U**p until 1972, the Biharis were average citizens of East Pakistan, who had lived there for some 25 years since the 1947 partition of India. When the war for Bangladesh started in 1971, the Biharis – rather like the Serbs of Knin in Croatia in 1990-1 – played a significant role in Pakistan's defense, forming local militias which acted with considerable savagery against Bengalis. After the war ended, the new Bangladesh government interned them in prisoner of war camps. As usual, the majority of internees were women and children. Neither the Pakistan nor the Bangladesh governments were prepared to offer the Biharis citizenship, though in the same years the Pakistani government offered some 150,000 Bengalis citizenship. Now the current Pakistani and Bangladeshi governments have tentatively agreed to repatriate these Biharis at the rate of 25,000 per year, that is, over a period of 10 years.

The repatriation of Biharis is a curious concept. We South Asians have a gift for turning nonsense phrases. Bihar is in India, but I have yet to hear of a Bihari Muslim who wishes to return to that beautiful and godforsaken land. As to that, the East Pakistani Biharis never lived in West Pakistan, so here we have a notional patria, or else the Muslim whose identity is defined by exclusion, as being a non-Bengali. (That at the same time

5. I have used Myron Weiner's figures here, which combine data from the annual reports of the US Committee for Refugees with data from the UNHCR, but have departed from his scheme of classification. Weiner categorizes the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as interstate rather than ethnic/communal conflicts. In other words, he defines ethnic conflicts as only those which are not interstate, a distinction which blurs rather than clarifies the category of ethnic/communal conflict. *Op. cit.*, pp. 13-17.

6. 4.8 million out of 9.7 million in 1969, and 8.3 million out of 16.5 million in 1992.

7. Though the last census of Afghanistan was conducted in 1973, estimates based on statistical projections concluded that the Afghan population on the eve of the Soviet invasion was roughly 16 million.

8. Thus, for example, while the UN gives the figure of 3.2 million, the US surveys give the figure of 2.6 million in their 1993 report. Interestingly, this is up from 1.9 million in their 1983 survey and 1.4 million in their 1970 survey. Weiner, *op. cit.*

the Bangladesh government is in the process of making peace with those other non-Bengali but accredited citizens, the tribals of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, appears to be another matter. But then, as Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad pointed out, the Biharis were once offered Bangladeshi citizenship and rejected it).<sup>9</sup>

**R**egional identities are, however, difficult to get away from. Thus, the Pakistan Sindhis oppose the repatriation of Biharis because they fear that they will swell the ranks of the *Mohajirs* (Bihari Muslims who came to West Pakistan at the time of Partition and settled in Sindh), and further exacerbate the ongoing conflict between native Sindhis and Mohajirs there. The Pakistan government has offered to settle the new Biharis in Punjab, but the Sindhis say they will inevitably trickle into Sindh, where they have compatriots who might – possibly – make them feel more welcome.<sup>10</sup> And who is to gainsay them? Even with our peculiarly shallow notions of citizenship, we South Asians have generally not restricted internal freedom of movement.

Except, perhaps, in the case of Jammu and Kashmir. The refugees of the 1948 Kashmir war, which resulted in the partition of the state into Pakistan-held Azad Kashmir (sic) and Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir have yet to receive Kashmiri/Indian citizenship. In the early 1950s, Sheikh Abdullah, the first Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, refused to give the refugees from Azad Kashmir, the majority of whom were Hindu and

Sikh but who also included Muslims, citizenship. Sheikh Abdullah's refusal was largely because of land hunger, and partly because the status of Azad Kashmir was disputed and thus the question of the refugees' right to return remained open.

The Indian government also refused them citizenship, though Bangladeshi refugees were later resettled as far from Bengal as Delhi, again because both the status of Azad Kashmir and of Jammu and Kashmir were disputed. The curious fact in all this is that though some of the 1948 refugees have 'trickled through' to parts of India, and a considerable number to Delhi, the majority remain in Jammu and very few indeed have made their way to the Kashmir Valley (which has from the very start been the chief bone of contention among Kashmiris and between India and Pakistan).

**T**his said, the South Asian experience points up the curious anomalies of refugee and host existence. Predictably, the 1991 Pentagon warning about the refugee threat to the West of new ethnic and communal conflicts in the East and South proved both ahistorical and misplaced. Despite ongoing conflicts in several parts of the former Soviet Union, refugee flows – even from one republic to another – have been relatively limited (with the exception of Nagorno-Karabakh, 90% of whose Azerbaijani population is now in Azerbaijan proper). The bulk of African refugees remain in Africa, and, as has been the case for decades, it is close neighbours who have taken the bulk of refugees from ongoing ethnic conflicts. Iran and Pakistan took in almost the entire Afghan refugee population: in 1990 there were 2.9 million Afghan refugees in Iran and 3.2 million in Pakistan. The bulk of refugees from the

wars in former Yugoslavia are in its new republics: Croat and Muslim refugees in Croatia, Serb refugees from Croatia in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serb and Muslim refugees in Serbia. The only two other major host countries are Germany and Turkey. Yet pressure for the return of refugees to former Yugoslavia has come from the Scandinavian countries and Germany.

**S**peaking of the reception given to Afghan refugees by Iran and Pakistan, the UNHCR representative, Sri Wijeratne, commented, 'both countries responded with a generosity of spirit that has not been paralleled since.'<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the real if unrecognized point of the Pentagon's warning of new refugee threats was both to give grist to Europe's new delimitation and to point to a new post-Cold War role for NATO (humanitarian intervention or peace-enforcement as a way of keeping refugees at home).

Before we hasten to conclude that we non-Europeans are, as we always knew, infinitely more hospitable than the Europeans, two points should be made. Though in general the southern and Middle Eastern countries have not built walls against refugees or migrants as the northern and western countries have, since we leave our own citizens to make do as best they can, there is little virtue in that. Second, ill-founded as the fears of new refugee threats to the West might be, emerging trends such as the war crimes tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, support for free media and aid for infrastructural and educational development indicate that they might yield more support to build institutions of democracy in weak or failing states.

9. *Dawn*, 22.1.1998

10. The British Jews, in fact, were foremost in lobbying against Britain's admission of more Jews, fearing that an expansion of the Jewish population might make them targets of British racism.

11. UNHCR, *Focus: Afghanistan, the Unending Crisis*, p. 4.

# In international law

B. S. CHIMNI

THE international legal regime for the protection of refugees is constituted by a complex network of national and international laws which operate in conjunction. The present essay merely offers a conspectus on international laws (as opposed to national laws) which govern the world of refugees.

*The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees:* The end of the Second World War saw millions of people displaced and led to the adoption of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the status of refugees (hereafter the 1951 Convention) which was drafted at the initiative of the UN Commission on Human Rights by concerned UN bodies between 1948-51. It has been ratified by 130 countries. India is not a party to the convention. The 1951 Convention has several achievements to its credit.

First, it contains a general definition of the term 'refugee'. Article 1(2)(A) states that the term refugee shall apply to any person who: '...as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for

reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'

A key feature of the definition is that refugees are people who have crossed an international border and therefore are to be distinguished from internally displaced persons (IDPs) who, vide the international law principles of sovereignty and non intervention, are the concern of states of which they are nationals.

Second, it incorporates the principle of *non-refoulement*, the cardinal principle of international refugee law. Article 33(1) of the convention states: 'No contracting state shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom

would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.'

The principle of non refoulement has also come to be included in other international instruments (e.g. Article 3 of the 1984 Convention against Torture). It is important not to confuse the principle of non refoulement with the duty of states to grant asylum; the former only requires admission to safety and exemption from forcible return and not recognition of an individual right of asylum. The benefit of the principle of non-refoulement is, however, not available to a refugee who is regarded as a danger to the security of the country in which she is present.

**T**hird, the convention outlines the minimum standard of treatment of refugees, including the basic rights to which they are entitled. It also notes the duties which refugees owe to the country of refuge. Fourth, it contains provisions concerning their juridical status, gainful employment and welfare. The convention also embodies provisions regarding the issue of identity and travel documents, naturalization and other administrative matters. Fifth, the convention vide Article 35 requires contracting states to cooperate with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the exercise of its functions, in particular to facilitate its duty of supervising the application of its provisions.

However, the 1951 Convention possessed some disturbing features. First, despite objections by Third World countries, the scope of the convention was limited to events occurring before 1951, and further, states were given the option to limit the geographical scope of these events to Europe, thus confining their obligations

under the convention to European refugees alone. Second, the definition of refugee confined protection to those who feared persecution because of their civil or political, as opposed to their socio-economic, status. This allowed the instrument to be used as a political weapon against the former socialist states which were more vulnerable in this area.

**N**early 95 per cent of refugees admitted to the US over the years have come from the former socialist states revealing how the 1951 Convention became an instrument of Cold War politics. This is confirmed by the fact that the end of the Cold War has seen western countries shutting the doors to refugees for they no longer possess either ideological or geopolitical value. I will return to this theme in the last section.

*The 1967 Protocol on Status of Refugees:* In 1967 a protocol on the status of refugees was adopted. Its key feature was that it prospectively removed the temporal and geographical limitations contained in the 1951 Convention. However, there was no attempt to reconsider the definition of the term 'refugee'. This meant that most Third World refugees continued to remain *de facto* excluded as their flight is frequently prompted by natural disaster, war, or political and economic turmoil, rather than by 'persecution', at least as that term is understood in the western context.

*The 1969 OAU Convention on Refugees:* In 1969, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) adopted a Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa which came into force in 1974. It was the first regional arrangement concerned with the protection of refugees and arrived at in the background of ongoing anti-colonial struggles. It had several firsts to its credit. First,

it expanded the definition of refugee. Over and above the 1951 Convention it states that: 'The term "refugee" shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.'

The addition implies a move away from the 1951 Convention's well-founded fear of persecution standard. It stresses that refugees include persons fleeing civil disturbances, violence and war, irrespective of whether or not they have a well-founded fear of persecution.

**S**Second, the principle of non-refoulement received a broader interpretation in the OAU Convention. Article II(3) talks about non-rejection 'at the frontier', the absence of which phrase has allowed developed states (as we shall see later) to enforce a number of restrictive measures at the border without being found in strict violation of the 1951 Convention. Third, in contrast to the 1951 Convention, the OAU Convention emphasizes the actual grant of asylum. Article II entitled 'Asylum' calls upon states to 'use their best endeavours consistent with their respective legislations to receive refugees and to secure the settlement of those refugees....'

Fourth, it is the only international instrument to contain a provision on voluntary repatriation, the preferred solution to the refugee problem. Article V entitled 'Voluntary Repatriation' emphasizes the essentially voluntary character of repatriation and lists the obligations placed on the country of origin to facilitate the resettlement of refugees who return.

Fifth, it contains an explicit provision articulating the principle of burden sharing. Article II (4) *inter alia* states: '...Member states shall in the spirit of African solidarity and international co-operation take appropriate measures to lighten the burden of the member state granting asylum. The principle of burden sharing deserves to be a focus of attention today when western states are practicing burden-shifting by closing their doors to refugees and being unwilling to share the financial burden of the poor countries hosting refugees.' Sixth, the OAU Convention vide Article VIII places a duty on every refugee to abstain from subversive activities against other member states.

*The Cartagena Declaration:* There is no other regional convention comparable to the OAU Convention. However, in 1984, the UNHCR convened a colloquium composed of government representatives and distinguished Latin American jurists which met in Cartagena, Colombia and adopted the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. The declaration recommends a definition similar to that contained in the OAU Convention. While this declaration is not binding, it was approved by the General Assembly of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in 1985. It has proved influential and its provisions have been incorporated in the domestic legislation of a number of states in the region.

Insofar as Asia is concerned, mention may be made of the principles concerning treatment of refugees adopted by the Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee (AALCC) in 1966. These principles are non binding and have not exercised the kind of influence that the Cartagena Declaration has in the Latin American region. On the other hand, none of the coun-

tries of South Asia are parties to the 1951 Convention. There are complex historical and political reasons peculiar to the region which account for this non-participation.<sup>1</sup>

The refusal to become a party is also understandable in view of the fact that western states have shown little respect for the letter and spirit of the 1951 Convention. What is unfortunate, however, is that a number of these countries, India included, have not adopted a national legislation for the protection of refugees. In India's case the judiciary has been helpful when approached with individual cases. However, as Chief Justice J.S. Verma recently observed, 'The attempt to fill the void by judicial creativity can only be a temporary phase. Legislation alone will provide permanent solution.'<sup>2</sup>

A few words on the UNHCR, the principal international agency for providing assistance and protection to refugees. The UNHCR was set up on 1 January 1951 for a period of three years in accordance with UN General Assembly (GA) resolutions 319(IV) of 3 December 1949 and 428(V) of 14 December 1950. The mandate is renewed every five years. The office was established as a subsidiary organ of the GA under Article 22 of the UN Charter. The High Commissioner acts under the policy directives given from time to time by the GA and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The work of the UNHCR, according to paragraph 2 of the statute of the

office, is to be entirely non-political in character. Its basic functions are the protection of refugees and seeking durable solutions to their problems. In both contexts the UNHCR works in close association with NGOs, an action permitted by the statute establishing the office.

The UNHCR is financed by a very limited subsidy from the regular budget of the UN (to be used exclusively for administrative costs) and through voluntary contributions from governments, NGOs and individuals. If financial power is not to be used to initiate policy changes not in consonance with the protection profile of the UNHCR, it is critical that states undertake to make mandatory contributions. The policy within the institution is shaped by the executive committee which today consists of 52 members and which from time to time adopts 'conclusions' which guide the office in its work. India became a member of the executive committee in 1995.

The notion of 'persons of concern' in the statute of the office of the UNHCR adopted by the GA on 14 December 1950 is similar to the refugee definition contained in the 1951 Convention. However, the notion has evolved over the years, in particular to meet situations in the Third World where the application of an individualistic definition was impractical and recourse was had to *prima facie* group determination of refugee status. This has been done through resolutions adopted by the UNGA and the ECOSOC.

The competence of the UNHCR has also been extended through authorising it to use its 'good offices' to transmit contributions to those who are not 'persons of concern' under the statute. Further, GA resolutions have authorised the UNHCR to assist and protect persons displaced outside their country of origin who may not strictly

1. For a brief review of the reasons why India is not a member, see B.S. Chimni, 'The Legal Condition of Refugees in India', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 7, 1994, pp. 378-401 at pp. 394-98.

2. J.S. Verma, 'Refugees in SAARC Region: Building a Legal Framework', Inaugural address at a seminar on Refugees in the SAARC Region: Building a Legal Framework, New Delhi, 2 May 1997, pp. 3-9.



fulfil the refugee definition, extending its competence to persons who would be deemed refugees under the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration.

Finally, the office of the UNHCR has been asked to come to the assistance of IDPs in certain limited circumstances. However, in recent years the involvement of the UNHCR with IDPs is increasing. Experts feel that its extensive involvement with IDPs may take place at the expense of diluting its concern for the rights of refugees, in particular the right to seek asylum.

**T**he three traditional solutions to the refugee problem are resettlement in a third country, local integration and voluntary repatriation – with the last being described as the most preferred solution. In recent years it is the solution of voluntary repatriation which is emphasized as resettlement has lost its use for western states after the end of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Even throughout the 1980s the number of resettlement cases averaged 122,000 per year. However, by 1992 the number had plummeted to a mere 37,000 or 0.2 per cent of the total number of refugees in the world. Local integration, on the other hand, is a rare event.

The international legal framework of voluntary repatriation is not adequately developed. There is no single universally binding legal instrument which lays down the principle of voluntary repatriation. In general terms one can, of course, make ready reference to Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that 'Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.'

The 1969 OAU Convention remains the only international legal

instrument which establishes norms concerning voluntary repatriation. Reference may, however, be made to the conclusions adopted by the executive committee of the UNHCR on the subject of voluntary repatriation. While these conclusions are not legally binding they offer guidance as to the standards and practices which should govern voluntary repatriation. The first set of conclusions were adopted in 1980 (conclusion 18) and the second set in 1985 (conclusion 40). In the last few years the consensus contained in these texts is being increasingly questioned.

In this context there is a continuous need to stress that repatriation should only be voluntary and be carried out in conditions of absolute safety. In the only case decided on the issue in India, the Madras High Court in *P. Neduraman and Dr. S. Ramadoss v. The Union of India and the State of Tamil Nadu* (1992) emphasized the need to guarantee the voluntary character of repatriation.

**I**n this section I would like to draw the attention of the reader to certain disturbing developments in recent years concerning the institution of asylum.<sup>4</sup> A whole host of restrictive practices have been institutionalized in the western world to prevent refugees fleeing underdeveloped countries from arriving at its doorsteps. The Canadian sociologist Anthony Richmond has gone so far as to call this an attempt to construct global apartheid. I will identify below a few of the measures and interpretations which have been mobilized for the containment of refugees.

4. B.S. Chimni, 'The Language of Protection and the Reality of Rejection: End of Cold War and Crisis in Refugee Law', in K.P. Saksena (ed.), *Human Rights: Perspective and Challenges*, Lancer Books, New Delhi, 1994; B.S. Chimni, 'Globalization and Refugee Blues', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 8, 1995, pp. 298-99.

First, there are the restrictive visa policies and carrier sanctions; the latter making airline carriers liable to fines for carrying passengers without proper papers. Second, 'international zones' have been demarcated in airports where physical presence does not amount to legal presence and from where summary and arbitrary removal is permissible. Third, safety zones have been created inside countries – as in Northern Iraq and former Yugoslavia – to stop asylum seekers moving out and seeking refuge. As it turned out, these safe zones were the most unsafe you could imagine.<sup>5</sup>

**F**ourth, the principle of non-refoulement has been given an extremely narrow interpretation. For example, in *Sale v. Haitian Centers Council* [113 S.Ct 2549 (1993)] the US Supreme Court decided that the act of interdicting Haitian refugees on the high seas and returning them to their country of origin irrespective of the claims to having a well founded fear of persecution was not violative of Article 33 of the 1951 Convention. This decision met with near universal disapproval and has been described by the High Commissioner for Refugees as 'a setback to modern international refugee law.'

Fifth, most countries in Europe and the US since 1 April 1997, are implementing the 'safe third country' concept whereby asylum seekers are denied access to a comprehensive asylum determination procedure because they could apparently have sought protection in countries they passed through to reach their ultimate destination. This concept has grave conse-

3. B.S. Chimni, 'Voluntary Repatriation: A Critical Note', *International Journal of Refugee Law*, vol. 3, 1991, pp. 541-547.

5. B.S. Chimni, 'The Incarceration of Victims: Deconstructing Safety Zones', in N. Al-Nauimi and R. Meese (eds.), *International Legal Issues Arising Under the United Nations Decade of International Law*, Kluwer Law International, The Netherlands, 1995, pp. 823-854.

quences for the asylum seeker and has led to chain deportations, often back to the country from which the refugee fled. In an unfortunate decision, the German Federal Constitutional Court, in May 1996, upheld the German safe third country law legitimizing its practice in other countries as well. A recent report of the USCR, however, recommends that 'the use of national safe third country national laws and practices should be discontinued immediately.'<sup>6</sup>

**S**ixth, on the same theme, mention may be made of attempts to harmonise internal procedures in Europe. This has led to the adoption of two conventions known as the Dublin and Schengen Conventions which have recently come into force. The USCR has recommended the scrapping of these conventions as well insofar as the criteria used for determining claims of asylum seekers is concerned. It recommends that 'the country where the asylum seeker first chooses to seek asylum, rather than the country of first arrival, should normally assume responsibility for adjudicating the asylum claim.'<sup>7</sup>

Seventh, asylum seekers have been held in offshore camps which have been effectively declared rights free zones. For example, when the US started holding Haitian and Cuban refugees at Guantánamo Bay, a territory leased out from Cuba, a US Court of Appeals ruled in *Cuban American Bar Association (CABA) v. Christopher* [43 F.3d 1412 (11th Cir. 1995)] that refugees in 'safe haven' camps outside the US did not have constitutional rights of due process or equal protection, and were not protected against forced return. This is, accord-

ing to Bill Frelick of the United States Committee on Refugees (USCR), 'an open invitation for abusive and arbitrary conduct.'

**E**ighth, where an asylum seeker manages to cross these hurdles a very restrictive interpretation is given to the definition of refugee contained in the 1951 Convention. For example, asylum seekers fleeing former Yugoslavia, most of whom met the 1951 Convention definition, have been denied refugee status. Some countries (Canada, for example) have also invoked the internal flight alternative (IFA) test to deny refugee status.

A positive development in the realm of definition is that a number of countries including Canada (1993) and the US (1995) have issued guidelines on women refugees fearing gender-related persecution. These guidelines recognize that women may experience discrimination unique to their gender and that in some cases they can meet the standards for refugee status. However, in view of the legal barriers designed to keep asylum seekers out, women will not be able to access the status determination procedures in these countries.

Together, these interpretations and measures manifest a language of rejection which threatens the very institution of asylum. It needs to be urgently replaced with the customary language of protection which demands empathy and solidarity with the pain of victims, a complete respect for the principle of non-refoulement to ensure that the basic rights of refugees are respected, and finally guarantees that refugees are not coerced to go back to situations from which they have fled in the first place. In sum, it demands that solidarity, and not rejection and segregation, be the edifice on which to construct a new world order.

# Refugees and human rights

BRIAN GORLICK

'... it is on human rights issues which affect refugees and displaced persons that the sincerity of the international community will be tested.'

Sadako Ogata,  
UN High Commissioner  
for Refugees

HUMAN rights are freedoms which are granted equally to all persons without distinction. In a sense, human rights are universally recognized standards of behaviour. The violation of these standards by states, or other agents, may give rise to situations which lead to the creation of refugees. Refugees, by definition, are victims of human rights violations.<sup>1</sup>

Viewing the refugee problem in the context of human rights is clearly relevant. In fact, the origin of the international system of refugee protection, as codified in international refugee law, grew out of concern for the plight of refugees fleeing the troubles of post-war Europe. Regrettably, protecting and assisting victims of human rights violations which result in forced displacement is as relevant today as it was some 50 years ago. Refugees are not simply victims of human rights

1. A key element of the refugee definition as found in the 1951 Refugee Convention is fleeing one's country of origin 'owing to a well-founded fear of persecution.' Persecution is not defined in international refugee or human rights law. However, one commentator has offered the following description: '...persecution may be defined as the sustained or systematic violation of basic human rights demonstrative of a failure of state protection. A well-founded fear of persecution exists

violations, however, as they represent a distinct group of individuals who are without the protection of a national state. Hence, the international system of refugee law was adopted in order to replace the protection which is normally provided, or is at least the responsibility of national governments for their citizens.

The idea of developing a system of law which protects the human rights of individuals is also not new. Many states have been established on the basis that individuals have certain inherent rights which must be respected by the state. The idea of establishing a system of human rights law at the international level is a more recent development which has been catalysed through the United Nations. The UN Charter proclaims in its preamble that 'promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion' is a primary purpose of the United Nations. Member states of the UN pledge themselves to take action in cooperation with the United Nations to achieve this purpose.

when one reasonably anticipates that the failure to leave the country may result in a form of serious harm which government cannot or will not prevent....' James Hathaway, 'Fear of Persecution and the Law of Human Rights', *Bulletin of Human Rights*, 91/1, United Nations, New York, 1992, p. 99.

2. There are currently 132 state parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol

With the adoption of the UN Charter in 1945 and the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951,<sup>2</sup> a number of other international human rights instruments have been developed and adopted by member states of the United Nations. These include the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) – collectively known as the International Bill of Rights – the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954), and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1965). More recently, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) have been developed at the international level.

In addition to the central foundational status of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, more than 186 states have ratified or adhered to at least one (or in a majority of cases more) of these international treaties, thus establishing binding legal obligations of a continuing nature. Several South Asian states are party to a number of these major human rights conventions, in addition to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols concerning the laws of war.

relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1(A) of the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as any person who: '...owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is

Among the international human rights treaties, India is party to the two international covenants in addition to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. India has also ratified the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. India recently ratified the 1984 Convention Against Torture.<sup>3</sup>

On a regional basis, a number of human rights treaties have also been adopted including the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights

unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it....'

3. *The Asian Age*, 17 August 1997, quoted a statement issued by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs that India's accession to the Convention Against Torture is part of 'India's determination to uphold the greatest values of Indian civilisation and our policy to work with other members of the international community to promote and protect human rights.'

In the refugee context, ratification of the Convention Against Torture is extremely important as Article 3(1) provides that: 'No State Party shall expel, return (refouler) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he or she would be in danger of being subjected to torture.' Article 3(2) further provides that: 'For the purpose of determining whether there

(1981). In South Asia, despite efforts in this direction, no regional human rights framework has been established. However, some states, including India, have enacted national human rights legislation and have established human rights commissions.

In India the relevant legislation is The Protection of Human Rights Act (1993), which established the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Under this act, the NHRC has authority to inquire *suo moto* or on petition by a victim or any person on his or her behalf into a complaint of violation of human rights. Till date, the NHRC has investigated a number of complaints involving refugees. The 1996 Indian Supreme Court case of *National Human Rights Commission v. State of Arunachal Pradesh and another*,<sup>4</sup> is hailed as a landmark judgment in the area of refugee protection in the context of India and underlines the usefulness of engaging a national human rights machinery for refugee protection.

Besides the development of legal instruments and mechanisms, whether international, regional, or national, there is increasing agreement among states on the universal, indivisible and interdependent nature of all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural. The 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, attended by some 5000 delegates from 171 states, reaffirmed the importance of the international system of human rights protection. The Vienna Declaration included a specific section

are such grounds, the competent authorities shall take into account all relevant considerations including, where applicable, the existence in the state concerned of a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights.'

4. *National Human Rights Commission v. State of Arunachal Pradesh and another*, (1996) 1 SCC 295.

on refugees. It reaffirmed the right of everyone to seek and enjoy asylum, as well as the right to return to one's own country. It also emphasized the importance of addressing 'the root causes' of forced displacements and identified 'the responsibilities of states, particularly as they related to the countries of origin.'

In the international system of human rights protection, the grant of asylum by a state to persons entitled to invoke Article 14 of the UDHR cannot be regarded as an unfriendly act by another state. Similarly, and particularly in the post-Cold War context, it is widely acknowledged that international attention to human rights violations is not an interference in a country's domestic affairs, but is rather part of routine international diplomacy. Although some states will go to great lengths to avoid scrutiny or criticism before international human rights bodies, the international community has identified a need to strengthen and improve application and enforcement of the international system of human rights protection.

This has been realized through, for example, the UN-sponsored human rights missions in Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda; the establishment of international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda; and technical cooperation in the field of human rights with governments and other actors. Of course, the degree varies, ranging from assistance and advice, to monitoring and reporting and direct protection.

In its own policies and programmes the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, has incorporated a number of human rights principles. Its protection activities in countries of asylum and countries of origin include working

with states in the areas of legal rehabilitation, institution building, law reform and enforcement of the rule of law and providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Increased cooperation with international and regional human rights mechanisms are also new areas of involvement for UNHCR.

Of course, these activities add to an already overburdened agenda. Some states have expressed concern that UNHCR should not undertake tasks which go beyond its formal mandate. This concern is well taken. These activities are placing considerable strain on UNHCR's limited resources. Further, the question of whether UNHCR has the capacity and capability to do these tasks must be addressed. However, in this era of downsizing and reform of the UN system in general, it seems unlikely that UNHCR will be allowed to continue its activities along traditional lines.

In efforts to prevent refugee flows the UN and others, notably NGOs, are providing technical assistance to states within a general human rights framework. This includes the promotion of human rights standards through the training of judges, lawyers, and human rights activists; giving substance to educational rights by funding the construction of new schools in war-torn countries; and promoting economic rights through community based projects focused on providing assistance to returning refugees. Promoting enactment and enforceability of domestic refugee and human rights laws, promotion of national human rights institutions, and training of government authorities are other prevention oriented activities in which the UN, governments, and NGOs are increasingly engaged.

As part of the development of human rights principles through UN

conventions, a number of international treaty bodies, or committees, have been established to investigate violations, enforce standards, and assist states in implementing their treaty obligations. These bodies have the authority to examine periodic state party reports regarding implementation of the treaty provisions. And with the agreement of states, some treaty bodies have the competence to investigate and decide upon individual and inter-state complaints and undertake field missions in order to monitor implementation measures.

**D**uring examination of state party reports the committees may prepare formal conclusions and observations on the performance of states in complying with international human rights law. They may also formulate specific recommendations to governments. In recent years, some of these committees such as the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Committee Against Torture, have regularly raised issues about the treatment of refugees by state parties to the respective conventions.<sup>5</sup>

In general, the UN human rights machinery has paid great attention to the plight of refugees. This raises awareness of refugee protection issues

5. Most recently, the third periodic report of India was examined by the UN Human Rights Committee during its 60th session held at Geneva. In its 'Concluding Observations' under the heading 'Subjects of Concern and Committee's Recommendations', the committee remarked as follows: The committee, noting that international treaties are not self-executing in India, recommends that steps be taken to incorporate fully the provisions of the covenant into domestic law, so that individuals may invoke them directly before the courts. The committee also recommends that consideration be given by the authorities to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), enabling the committee to receive individual communications relating to India. (Para 13).

through promoting legal standards for refugees and internally displaced persons in addition to sharing information concerning incidents of violations of refugees' rights. Human rights NGOs and UNHCR have played a key role in educating members of the international and domestic human rights communities on the linkages between safeguarding human rights and refugee protection. These initiatives have firmly entrenched human rights issues in relation to the refugee problem.<sup>6</sup>

**T**he refugee issue in India, and throughout South Asia, is an age-old problem. Indeed, the formation of the modern Indian state coincided with a massive exodus and influx of displaced persons. Some 30 million persons travelled across the newly formed borders. Today, the refugee population in India is about 260,000 persons. The largest groups comprise about 100,000 Tibetans followed by 64,000 Sri Lankan Tamils, 44,500 Chakmas from Bangladesh, 19,000 Afghans and a 1,000 of other nationalities mainly from Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Myanmar.

While the Government of India recognizes Tibetans, Chakmas and Sri Lankan Tamils as refugees, other groups are not recognized and are con-

sidered foreign nationals temporarily residing in India. The 20,000 refugees not recognized by the GOI are assisted by UNHCR and provided international protection and assistance under its mandate.<sup>7</sup> Regrettably, given the present political turmoil in neighbouring countries, particularly in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Myanmar, it is expected that the number of persons seeking refuge in India will continue to increase.

**T**he legal authority to deal with issues of citizenship, naturalization, and foreigners rests with the Union legislature. In the Indian context, influx of refugees has been handled by administrative decisions rather than through specific legislative enactments. Some specific groups of asylum seekers from neighbouring countries have been accorded asylum by the Indian government on the basis that they are considered refugees. In fact, India accepts large groups of refugees who are fleeing not just for reasons relating to *persecution*, but also due to *generalized violence* (eg., Sri Lankan Tamils). It means India *de facto* accepts the definition of 'refugee' as found in the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention, rather than

7. UNHCR is authorized *inter alia* to 'assume the function of providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions to the problem of refugees by assisting governments....' In practice, these functions include determining the status of individual applicants for refugee status, as is the case for non-government assisted refugees in India and other countries of South Asia, and seeking durable solutions to their problems which may require promoting local integration, facilitating voluntary repatriation, or resettlement to a third country. The statute of the UNHCR is appended to UN General Assembly resolution 428(V) of 1950.

8. In addition to the refugee definition contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which are the primary international legal instruments for refugee status

the narrower definition provided in the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>8</sup>

However, this does not hold good for all groups. Certain refugees like Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, Somalis, Sudanese, and Myanmar are not recognized by the Indian government. Consequently, UNHCR had to intervene through determining and granting refugee status under its mandate. This differential treatment of refugees is a fundamental problem. It negates the provision of legal rights and assistance which would normally be granted by an asylum country. Moreover, it is not clear what legal status or rights accrue to a person as a result of registration by the GOI as a refugee, nor the relationship between 'refugee' status granted by the government and corresponding national laws governing the entry and stay of foreigners.

**T**he host of international human rights instruments which have been ratified by India and other South Asian countries may significantly strengthen the international regime of human rights protection in South Asia.<sup>9</sup> Curiously, however, none of the South Asian countries have acceded to the international refugee instruments. Nor have any of them enacted a domestic legal framework in the form of a

applied by states, later international refugee instruments such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa broadened the scope of the term 'refugee', so as to include: '...every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing the public order in either part or the whole of his or her country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his or her place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his or her country of origin or nationality....'

9. As concerns the application of international human rights standards in domestic law, the Chief Justice of India, J.S. Verma, recently noted in a speech at the SAARC Law and

Concerning refugees, the Human Rights Committee further stated: The committee expresses concern at reports of forcible repatriation of asylum seekers, including those from Myanmar (Chins), the Chittagong Hills and the Chakmas (sic). It recommends that, in the process of repatriation of asylum seekers or refugees, due attention be paid to the provisions of the covenant and other applicable international norms. (Para 30) See UN Document CCPR/C/60/IND/3 of 30 July 1997.

6. A useful compilation of the various activities of the UN human rights bodies concerning refugees and issues of forced displacement is found in the UN Commission on Human Rights Report entitled 'Human Rights, Mass Exodus and Displaced Persons' (ref: E/CN.4/1997/42 of 14 January 1997).

refugee or asylum law, or at least a determination procedure.

Furthermore, in light of existing human rights standards in South Asia, both through accession to international instruments and domestic laws, some may argue that it is unnecessary to adopt a law which provides specific recognition and protection to refugees. Others have suggested that such an exercise is too burdensome and would only create another set of legal obligations which the state will have difficulty fulfilling. Moreover, for a developing country such as India, the financial burden of hosting large numbers of refugees and ensuring that certain legal rights are fulfilled is simply too much to bear.

It is true that the international refugee instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, in addition to defining who is a refugee, contain certain 'rights' provisions. This includes protection from refoulement, or forced

UNHCR seminar on Refugees in the SAARC Region held in New Delhi on 2 May 1997 that: 'In the absence of national laws satisfying the need (to protect refugees), the provisions of the (1951 Refugee) Convention and its Protocol can be relied on when there is no conflict with any provision in the municipal laws. This is a cannon of construction, recognized by the courts in enforcing the obligations of the state for the protection of the basic human rights of individuals. It is more so when the country is a signatory to the international convention which implies its consent and obligation to be bound by the international convention, even in the absence of expressly enacted municipal laws to that effect....' For a recent judicial application of this reasoning, see the Indian Supreme Court judgment of *Vishaka et al. v. State of Rajasthan et al.*, Writ Petition (Criminal) Nos. 666-70 of 1992, unreported judgment of 13 August 1997.

Certain 'rights' provisions of the Indian Constitution such as Article 14 (right to equality) and Article 21 (right to life and liberty) are available to non-citizens, including refugees. See the *National Human Rights Commission v. State of Arunachal Pradesh and another*, op cit. and *Khudiram Chakma v. Union of India*, (1994) Supp. 1 SCC 614.

return, protection against unlawful expulsion or detention, the right to employment and education, access to the courts, and freedom of movement, to name a few. In respect of many of these rights, refugees are supposed to receive the same treatment as nationals in the country of residence. Of course, certain provisions of the international refugee regime such as access to education and employment may incur financial hardship on developing countries. Many of these countries cannot cater to the basic needs of their own people.

However, it is not expected that a state would be obliged to fully implement the provisions of the international treaties overnight. These particular legal obligations, in the realm of socioeconomic rights, could be progressively implemented while taking into account the economic situation of the country concerned.

Finally, an oft-voiced criticism is that the international refugee regime is out of date and is being flouted by the industrialized countries. Thus, it is argued, a new legal regime should be enacted and efforts made to better enforce the international protection regime for refugees. Of course, a fundamental difficulty of international law is how to enforce it. Although a majority of the world's countries are state parties to the international refugee instruments and related human rights treaties which provide protection to refugees, it is extremely difficult for the international community or UNHCR to challenge the practices of some states who take a restrictive approach to refugees, whether through developments in the law or administrative arrangements. Unlike the human rights treaties, no supervisory committee exists in international refugee law to enforce implementation of the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967

Protocol through a formal process of interstate scrutiny.

Nevertheless, given the generally positive record of receiving and hosting refugees, it may be time for South Asian countries to codify their 'good practice' through acceding to the international refugee instruments and enacting national refugee laws. It is not a sound argument to suggest that as a result of an already generous approach to refugees no specific law is required. This would be like saying that because a state respects the rights of its people, there is no need for a constitution. The protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees through national human rights machinery should be further explored, as it is clear that the complementarity of international refugee and human rights law in the context of national procedures could provide a suitable legal framework within which to develop principles of refugee protection.

In this context, a greater challenge for the countries of South Asia may be to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its Protocol and demonstrate to the industrialized world how the spirit and scope of the refugee treaties can be implemented and respected. This would enhance South Asia's image as committed to upholding the human rights of all persons, including refugees. It would also be consistent with their broader human rights obligations as members states of the United Nations.

Ironically, three South Asian countries – Bangladesh, India and Pakistan – are members of the UNHCR executive committee. And yet, as noted, none of these countries have formalized their commitment to protecting and assisting refugees through adopting an international or national legal framework. Isn't it time to do so?

# Having lost our homeland

AHILAN ARULANATHAN and  
ELIZBETH van SCHAAK

ALTHOUGH precise numbers are not readily available, since 1983 Sri Lanka's civil war has claimed the lives of over 40,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, over one million<sup>2</sup> people have been internally displaced by the conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and over 200,000 have fled to India since the early 1990s. While some of these refugees have integrated into Tamil society in South India, most (69,000) reside in state-run refugee camps scattered throughout Tamil Nadu.<sup>3</sup> Over the past few years, government statistics and newspaper

reports suggest that the flight of Tamils from Sri Lanka to India has gained momentum despite the increasing scarcity of boats and close monitoring of refugee movements by the Sri Lankan and Indian navies.<sup>4</sup>

This essay examines the situation and treatment of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in camps in Tamil Nadu. It is based on field studies conducted by the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC). Although, the GOI has not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its Optional Protocols, the treatment and protection of refugees, in particular the principle of *non-refoulement*, has become a part of

4. Government statistics indicate that in the last five months of 1996, 7108 Tamils arrived at Rameswaram or Dhanushkodi, and a further 910 arrived between 1 January and 8 May 1997. Refugee flows continued for quite some time.

1. Voice of America (VOA) Broadcast, 1 October 1997.

2. Law and Society Trust, *Sri Lanka: State of Human Rights 1995* (Colombo: Law and Society Trust, 1996), 225.

3. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996*, 1490.



customary international law. International human rights instruments and in particular the Convention Against Torture recognize the principle of non refoulement. India as a member of the executive committee of the UNHCR and assignatory to many human rights instruments is obliged to abide by them.

NGOs attempting to aid the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have faced numerous impediments in carrying out their activities. All NGOs were restricted from working in the refugee camps as a result of an order (Ir.no. C2.4095/92) promulgated by the Tamil Nadu government in June 1993. The government, however, tolerated OfERR, a refugee organization, providing some essential services.

**A**fter the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) came to power in June 1996, the situation has slightly improved. In January 1997, the GOI, after consulting with the DMK-led government, in an order (letter no. 45043/96-4) relaxed the restrictions on NGO operations in the camps.

Under the current official policy, NGOs with security clearance and which receive government approval may serve the refugee population. However, they are not allowed to provide relief 'directly' and must operate through government organizations. Some NGOs like OfERR have reached a 'working arrangement' with the government whereby, after informing the appropriate authorities, they are able to provide services directly to the refugees.<sup>5</sup>

But, the precise status (and legality) of the NGO operations in the camps remains ambiguous. This uncertainty creates disparities in their

ability to provide services to the refugees. At any time and in any area, government agents may suddenly decide to enforce the rules, resulting in a restriction of services for the refugee population. Since March 1997, in Uchapatti camp of Madurai district, OfERR has not been allowed to distribute the Bengal gram protein supplement (given to children between 2 and 5 years old). Finally, as with NGOs elsewhere in India, they may only receive foreign funds with the prior approval of the Government of India.

It is a part of the GOI's policy to ignore the refugee problem by neglecting camp conditions in an attempt to pressurise the refugees to leave (overtly and covertly) when the situation in Sri Lanka allows it. The operations of the Indian Navy also make it exceedingly difficult for refugees to reach India. The government has created 'special camps', ostensibly to segregate Tamil militants from the rest of the refugee population.

The DMK government has been somewhat responsive to requests for improvements in camp conditions leading to a few positive developments like lifting the ban on refugees attending universities in June 1996. However, it remains at least as harsh as the previous AIADMK regime in its attempts to discourage refugees from coming to the country, and in its handling of the security situation in the camps.

**T**he 1951 Convention and other international human rights instruments provide guidelines for housing, food, water, nutrition, health care, education, and employment of the refugees. During the field visits,

vices in the presence of government officials because, in most cases, the officials do not live in the camps, and therefore are unlikely to be available on every occasion that services are provided.

SAHRDC sought information on the following aspects of camp life: shelter, sanitation, food, government stipend (or dole), water, health care, education, movement restriction and social welfare.

The situation in the camps appears appalling. People live in extremely cramped quarters that in most cases were clearly designed for temporary accommodation. Food rations are inadequate, water sources are scarce, and children are alarmingly small for their age. Under international law, the condition of any refugee camp is to be evaluated in the context of the living conditions of the local population. Food and water shortages, and malnutrition exist in other parts of Tamil Nadu and, at least in theory, the refugees have access to the same government ration system utilized by the poorer sections of the local population.

**U**nfortunately, the refugees are at a disadvantage relative to the general population in several key respects. First, NGOs seeking to provide services to the refugees are subject to constraints and they cannot operate 'directly' in the camps. They may only operate with foreign funds subject to approval from the GOI. Additionally, orders restricting the movement of refugees promulgated during the previous AIADMK regime persist. Consequently, refugees living in areas where employment is scarce are legally barred from travelling long distances to work. Although the rules restricting freedom of movement are not enforced strictly, their very existence makes the refugees vulnerable to exploitation by government officials.

SAHRDC visits revealed that even in 'ideal' situations, where the refugees did not suffer from movement restrictions and employment opportunities near the camp were plen-

5. OfERR workers attested to the existence of this working arrangement. An OfERR worker stated that it would be practically impossible for them to actually carry out all of their ser-

tiful, three major problems were near universal. First, the lack of adequate sanitation facilities is a problem even in the best of camps. Second, the number of drinking water sources remains unacceptably low in nearly every camp. Finally, even where movement restrictions are not enforced, they still exist on the books, leaving refugees vulnerable to mistreatment should a particular *tahsildar* (revenue official), collector, or other authority figure be so inclined. At almost all times, refugees are forced to act illegally in order to survive.

**A**rticle 21 of the refugee convention requires that they be granted housing provisions that are, 'as favourable as possible and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally.' Although their presence is a great burden upon the host country, refugees should receive all necessary assistance and be provided with the basic necessities of life, including shelter. Housing in the Tamil Nadu refugee camps falls well below universal standards.

The most common form of housing in the camps is a tar sheet hut. In general, tar sheets last about two years. However, many tar sheet huts were erected seven to eight years ago. Many have holes and therefore are unable to keep water out, especially during the rainy season. Substantial repairs are expensive: each tar sheet costs approximately Rs 50 and the roof of a typical tar sheet hut is composed of 30 tar sheets. Refugees do not have money to repair them and most have simply learnt to live with a leaking roof. Even if the huts are fully repaired, tar sheets have little ventilation, and therefore the interiors become extremely hot. During the dry season, when temperatures regularly reach over 37 degrees celsius, the huts become uninhabitable.

Many refugees who do not live in tar sheet huts live in 'godowns', large warehouses originally meant for the storage of grain (therefore intentionally designed to be poorly ventilated). Multiple families live in these structures, separated only by sheets. The lack of privacy serves to exacerbate social problems existing in refugee camps. Even where the refugees have more permanent housing, it is often inadequate and sub-standard. In the Athicatanoor camp in Salem, they are housed in semi-permanent tile structures with solid walls that were built to house Burmese refugees in 1958. Forty years later, the tiles are breaking in various spots and many houses leak.

**C**amp report information from the March-June 1996 data set indicates that sanitation facilities are grossly inadequate, both in terms of quantity and quality. The camps were originally supposed to provide a latrine for every 10 families, but none meets this standard. Of the 11 camps in the sample, four have no usable latrines, and another four have less than one working latrine for 100 people. The worst situation is in Paramathy camp with no functioning latrines for 1,166 refugees. Only one camp, Pambar, was anywhere near the suggested ratio of one latrine for 20 people. Even then, at the time of data collection, it had only 16 latrines for a population of 396. Moreover, that camp appears to be anomalous, as the second best conditions described in the data set, in the Thottanuttu camp, provide only one latrine for every 51 persons.<sup>6</sup>

Visits by SAHRDC researchers suggest that the figures in the data set may be relatively optimistic. Gummidipoondi, a relatively affluent camp

6. A visit to Thottanuttu camp revealed that since the data collection, several other latrines had become unusable, such that the camp

of 2,500 people near Chennai, has no working latrines. In Athicatanoor camp in Salem district, there have been no latrines for the past 2-3 years, and residents have often had to surreptitiously go outside as the farmers in the surrounding areas do not like them using the neighbouring lands. The nearby Pavalathanoor camp has no latrines for its 1,300 residents. The camp residents use a neighbouring road as a divider for men's and women's side.

The prevalence of inadequate sanitation creates numerous problems. People are forced to use the open air, which increases the spread of infectious diseases such as typhoid, particularly during the rainy season. Medical assessments indicate that such diseases are common. The use of open air also gives rise to social difficulties, particularly for female refugees.

**W**ithin the camps, the food and money situation is inextricably linked; the amount of money a family has is a key determinant of the food it is able to buy. The government provides a stipend at the following rate: the head of every family receives Rs 150/month, each other adult (above age 12) Rs 120/month.<sup>7</sup> For children (age 12 and below), the first child receives Rs 75/month, and each additional child Rs 37.5/month. Additionally, towards the end of 1997, there was a flat increase in the stipend of Rs 50/family (irrespective of family size).

The government also provides subsidized rice to the refugees. Each adult (above 8 years of age) receives 400 grams of rice/day at 57 paise/kilo. Each child (8 years and under) receives 200 grams/day at the same rate. Finally, the government's general ration of subsidized kerosene, sugar

currently has only two working latrines for approximately 540 people.

7. This was corroborated by many workers familiar with the situation, as well as refugees.

and wheat flour which it provides to the local population is also available to the refugees. The subsidized rice given to them, however, is of inferior quality.

**N**early everyone says that the government stipend (or dole as it is called) and rations are insufficient to ensure adequate food, especially for people with children. Rampant malnutrition also suggests that food is inadequate. While the recent increase in stipend payments undoubtedly helps, it is almost certainly not enough. Apart from the sheer lack of money, additional problems arise because the stipend arrives late. The dole is supposed to arrive in two installments – one on the first day of the month, the other on the 16th day. While the number of late deliveries has decreased under the current government, the consistency of timely dole deliveries depends on local government officials. For example, in Korukapatti camp (Salem district), the dole due on 1 July 1997 was not distributed until 14 July.

In some camps, subsidized rice and other goods from the government are only available on one or two days each month. Therefore, when the dole is late, refugees are forced to either borrow money to get the rations that day or buy these essentials outside the camp at market rates. In other cases, even when the dole arrives on time, the rations consistently arrive late. In the Pambar Dam camp in Dharmapuri, one woman reported that the dole money usually runs out by the time rations are available, as rations are usually 12 days late. She said she had been forced to take loans to meet her food requirements.

The combined effect of inadequate dole and food provisions is a well-documented widespread malnutrition among the refugee population. The most comprehensive study of the

nutrition situation in the camps, undertaken by Dutch Inter-Church Aid (DIA) and published in November 1995, described the following situation: 'The percentage of low birth weight (small for gestational age) was found to be high at 53% below 2.5 kg (2.5 kg is the average birth weight for this population)... Whilst no anthropometric data on adult women are available, the short stature of many women in the camps is visibly striking... Levels of underweight among children under 5 years of age remain surprisingly high, with 38-53% being moderately to severely undernourished. The trend is towards (an) increase in these levels.'<sup>8</sup> The study also found that malnutrition in the camps stems primarily from income-related food shortages.

**T**he government dole has remained unchanged since 1990 and, at 1995 prices, can purchase only 40% of the basic 'food basket'. A family has to be guaranteed access to 20 days of labour at adult male rates to ensure enough additional income to provide a complete, basic diet. Most families cannot do so, as government restrictions on movement of refugees limits access to sources of employment outside the camps.<sup>9</sup>

Since the release of the study, there has been a flat increase in the dole of Rs 50 per family. However, given the size of the 'gap' described above, coupled with the many needs of the refugee population (particularly housing), this increase is unlikely to be sufficient to solve the malnutrition problem. Given that the refugees' malnutrition problems are so closely

8. The Femconsult/Dutch Inter Church Aid/OiERR study, 'An Assessment of the Nutrition Enhancement and the Income Generation Programmes of OiERR', November 1995, p. 10, 12.

9. *Ibid.*, 10, 20.

related to the availability of money, which in turn is limited by the movement restriction policy, the late arrival of dole (on occasion), and the curbs on NGO activity, it is clear that the GOI plays a major role in contributing to the malnutrition problem of the Tamil refugees.

**T**he existence of a safe drinking water supply plays a crucial role in ensuring the health of a given community. Contaminated drinking water is a major source of disease. Additionally, general dehydration can be a contributing factor to many health problems. In general, the potable water systems in the camps are inadequate. Drinking water is drawn either from tube wells (constructed with a bore) or water pumps, which access water from 'tanks' which harvest rainwater. The reliability of the water supply depends on the season. During the rainy season, tanks are more likely to be full and the tube well supply stronger. However, even during the monsoon, refugees living in camps which have a low water source to population ratio are forced to wait in long lines for water.

During the dry season, the supply situation becomes precarious. SAHRDC was told that at the Chinnappalli Kuppum camp the water situation is particularly bad during the dry season, when people routinely wait 2 to 3 hours for water from the tube wells. People have to queue up to get water before leaving for work, thus requiring them to stand in line at 4 am. Overall, Chinnappalli Kuppum has only one source of potable water for 811 people.

The situation is worse in Palarannaikuttu camp, Vellore district (population 947), where there is actually no drinking water source within the camp. There are two bore wells, but the water is salty. The nearest potable water source is approximately

2 km from the camp—a natural spring which is not more than six or seven feet below the ground level. A stagnant pool is close by, and while the camp health worker told SAHRDC that the water source was not connected to the murky water, she acknowledged that in the rainy season run-off from one to the other was inevitable.

**N**umerous international instruments emphasize the importance of the availability of health care; *a fortiori* for particularly vulnerable groups. Unfortunately, the medical treatment available to Tamil refugees living in camps in Tamil Nadu does not even meet the 'United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.' Detailed information about health conditions is hard to come by. Despite the lack of hard data, certain aspects of the health problem in the camps are clearly visible. Most readily apparent is the strikingly stunted growth which is evident in all camps. This is a sure sign of malnutrition.

The presence of numerous communicable diseases presents a second substantial health problem. Though hard epidemiological data is lacking, doctors and health workers report that diarrhoea and respiratory illnesses are the most common diseases seen by health workers in the camps. The presence of these diseases is not surprising given the absence of reliable and adequate water supplies, the absence of lavatories in most camps, and the crowded housing conditions in which refugees live. Health workers report the presence of typhoid, tuberculosis and malaria. Though no epidemics of rat-borne diseases have been reported, health workers confirm the presence of rats in refugee camps.

In the context of these substantial health problems, access to health care poses unique difficulties. While

the local public health care system is generally open to refugees, such that most of them are in fact cared for by local public health authorities, their access to health services is limited, because camps are often in isolated areas and the government restricts their movements. Distance problems often force them to use local private practitioners, who charge much more.

The movement restrictions create problems because permission to leave the camp is needed prior to the time of departure. If the onset of illness is sudden, refugees cannot legally leave the camp to receive treatment as tahsildars live outside the camp. The restriction interferes with the operation of the health worker education/training programme in the same way that it interferes with refugee employment. Thus, the movement restriction decreases the availability of health services provided by the refugees to other refugees.

**E**ducation in Tamil Nadu is compulsory and free (except for certain yearly school fees) through the 12th standard. Until 1991, refugee children enjoyed access to primary education and various post-secondary courses in the surrounding community and in a variety of subjects. Refugee children received free textbooks, school uniforms and bus fare. Special admission quotas were reserved for refugee children over and above the usual enrolment of Indian students in medicine, polytechnic, engineering and other graduate and postgraduate programmes.

According to one refugee, these provisions for the education of refugee children represented perhaps the best treatment ever given to refugees by a host nation. However, in 1991, amidst the backlash against the Sri Lankan refugees following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, admission to

the higher education facilities mentioned above was revoked pursuant to a state government order.

In 1994, in response to demands made by individuals and organizations within India, orders were passed allowing refugee children to resume their education, but only through 12th standard. In 1997, following the election of the DMK government, refugees were allowed to enter universities. However, the concessions on school and examination fees were not reinstated.

Although the DMK government lifted the restriction, parents continue to experience difficulties in securing admission for their children to certain government schools. Many college authorities refuse to admit Sri Lankan refugees until they receive confirmation that the order permitting admission which was valid last year is still valid at this time. Nonetheless, most refugee children study in government schools. Some private schools also admit refugees. Generally, once the government authorizes admission, it is forthcoming.

**A**lthough the movement restrictions are not employment restrictions as such, they serve to limit the refugees' ability to secure adequate gainful employment. The restriction on the freedom of movement undermines their self-sufficiency. The orders restricting the movement of refugees issued in 1991 remain on the books. Camp residents are required to be in the camp at a certain time each morning and night. Moreover, they are allowed to leave for longer than that only for three days each month. Camp residents wishing to work outside the immediate vicinity usually cannot return in time for the registration checks. In camps where guards are strict, absent residents are reported to local police authorities. In other

camps, dole is deducted for the days when refugees are absent. Even in the most lenient camps, refugees must be present on days when the dole is distributed. Given the inadequacy of the dole, the effect of the movement restriction is debilitating.

**R**efugees commonly make an 'arrangement' with camp guards, collectors or tahsildars, allowing them to stay outside the camp to work for certain periods. In exchange, camp officials keep the refugees' dole. Refugees are commonly forced to choose between work and the dole, a choice the government should be discouraging rather than encouraging.

The movement restriction also prevents refugees from securing permanent productive employment that would allow them to properly integrate into Indian society. In the Kotupattu camp, one resident told SAHRDC that though he had a Bachelor's degree in commerce, he had no permanent job because to get a job suited to his qualifications he would have to travel far from the camp. Instead, he opted for daily labour jobs which were available nearby, including building and painting houses.

Originally, restrictions of movement were justified on security grounds: the rationale being that Tamil militants operate from the camps and the authorities need to monitor the movement of refugees. However, even if the refugee registration system ever served as an effective deterrent to militant activities, it seems inappropriate now. Many of the same refugees have lived in Indian camps for six or seven years. Presently its primary function is to inhibit the movement of health workers, the elderly, and others.

Health workers report widespread psychological problems among the refugee population. Many

also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders. Alcoholism, intra-familial violence, anxiety, depression, and a large number of suicides,<sup>10</sup> often among young people, indicate that the psychiatric problems in the refugee population are due more to situational conditions than to fundamental psychiatric disturbances. The reported incidence of early marriages in the camps also indicates a breakdown of social support systems among the refugee population.

Most refugees live in a vulnerable position. They often have to act illegally in order to survive and are subjected to arbitrary government control. There has been reported rise of prostitution. In addition, there are many thugs and agents who recruit refugee women to work as maids in the Middle East, where most end up working in extremely poor conditions. A woman stated that it was difficult to turn down the job offers because they are desperate for economic opportunities. Cases of refugees failing to receive compensation for work injuries and murders that police are reluctant to pursue also exist, suggesting that access to state protection is lacking among the refugee population.

**T**he Sri Lankan Tamil refugees continue to face problems from the Government of India and state government of Tamil Nadu in clear violation of international human rights law. Though most refugees are desirous of becoming self-supportive, they are hamstrung by the government's ill-conceived movement restriction policy. Consequently, the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees continue to endure needless hardships.

10. NGOs reported that in 1994 five people committed suicide in Taramangalam camp, due in part to a lack of food and government assistance.

# Survival dignity and democracy

CATHÉRINE MOLLER

SINCE September 1988, when the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) came to power, approximately one million Burmese nationals have fled to neighbouring states.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 55,000 Burmese nationals are currently in India. However, of that number, only about 467 are recognized and protected refugees of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). This report focuses on the plight of Burmese refugees in India, in particular the predicament of those who remain unrecognized and unassisted in the north eastern frontier, and the situation of the refugee population in Delhi.

Most of the data for this report was gathered over a three month period from May to July 1997. About 60 in-depth interviews were conducted with UNHCR officials, NGO representatives, Burmese refugee leaders, and

Burmese refugees. In this report, the term 'Burmese refugee' includes all nationals (including ethnic minorities) living within the territory known as Burma or Myanmar.

After the Burmese military crackdown in September 1988, up to 1000 students and youth fled to India, arriving in the north eastern states of Manipur and Mizoram. A few weeks after the first students arrived in the country, the GOI announced that as long as their lives were in danger, it would not turn any of them back. Since issuing that statement, with only few exceptions, it has demonstrated a lack of concern for their plight.<sup>2</sup>

Of those Burmese who fled to India, most arrived in Moreh, a border town in Manipur. They spent several nights to several weeks in the police station until refugee camps were set up. Refugee camps were ini-

tially set up close to the border. However, after threats from Myanmar's army, refugees were shifted to Leiken camp in Chandel district.<sup>3</sup> At the Leiken camp, 'We felt like prisoners,' said Soe Myint, executive committee member of the Delhi-based All Burma Student's League (ABSL). Without receiving adequate food, water, or medical attention, they contracted malaria, dysentery, and diarrhoea. After the media exposed that money provided by the government to meet the basic needs of the refugees had been embezzled by local officials, reporters were forbidden from meeting with the refugees.<sup>4</sup>

**R**efugees caught sneaking out of the camp to contact their associates, conduct political activities, or to purchase medical and food supplies were beaten and sent to Manipur central jail. They were charged under the Foreigner's Act and received jail sentences of up to one and a half years.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, a group of Indian lawyers secured their release and brought them to UNHCR in Delhi. After a few months, most were granted refugee status and financial support, becoming the first UNHCR-recognized Burmese refugees. At one time official registration at the Leiken camp reached several hundred refugees. Besides the 80 students who were forcibly deported by the Manipur authorities in March 1989, others secretly left the camp to continue their political struggle elsewhere, in Northern Burma, Bangladesh or Delhi. The camp was still open in 1997, however, with less than 30 people.

No one knows exactly how many Burmese nationals are in the Indo-Burma border areas, although there are over 40,000 displaced Burmese of Chin ethnicity in Mizoram alone. Accurate numbers do not exist because the region is isolated and remote and the

refugees do not identify themselves as such for fear of harassment, arrest or deportation.

Prior to 1990, most migrants were single males who were easily absorbed into the local economy. Employment opportunities in the North East since have shrunk dramatically. In Champhai, Mizoram the frustration and resentment of the local population has spilled over to the newcomers.

Starting in 1994, arrests and massive deportations of Burmese nationals began occurring in the border region. According to the Chin Refugee Committee (CRC), more than 10,000 Chin political refugees were taken in lorries by the Mizoram Police to Champhai, Saiha, and Cerhlun (small towns and villages situated on the border). Fortunately, many of the refugees were able to escape before being deported.

**I**n June 1995, tensions between the local Mizo population and Burmese Chins increased after Mizoram newspapers reported that the President of a village unit of the Young Mizo Association (YMA) had been shot and killed by three members of the Chin National Front (CNF). A reign of police terror and massive arrests followed. According to local newspapers, the home minister of Mizoram, Lalsangzuala, attended a youth rally in Aizawl and asked all Burmese nationals to leave Mizoram.

Tensions worsened after 9 August 1996, when a Mizo pastor was shot in Champhai district. Over the next few days, the CID<sup>6</sup> arrested at least 15 Chins from Aizawl without laying any formal charges. Many of those detained were tortured. Lian No Thang, a 20-year resident of Aizawl, was threatened by the Mizoram state CID on the 10 and 11 August and was told to leave Mizoram by 13 August

1996. Many observers are concerned that the 1998 Mizoram state elections are likely to create even more problems for Burmese nationals, particularly when people register to vote and when campaigns with anti-foreigner themes are launched.

**M**any refugee and humanitarian groups believe that the Indian government is more concerned about normalizing diplomatic relations and improving trade between the two countries than it is about the lives of tens of thousands of Burmese refugees living within its borders. With few exceptions, India's diplomatic and trade relationship with SLORC has been steadily improving. In August 1992, the first high-level meeting between India and Myanmar took place since 1987.<sup>7</sup> Again in 1995 and 1996, several sectoral and national level meetings were held to create mechanisms for 'curbing and containing insurgency' in the border region and to open up cross-border trade.<sup>8</sup> On 12 April 1995, a series of joint military campaigns, known as 'Operation Golden Bird', were launched to quell border insurgency. In August 1996, 12 Burmese refugees (including 6 UNHCR-protected refugees) were refouled.

UNHCR's mandate to protect and assist refugees extends only to those living in Delhi. Even so, many refugee and humanitarian groups believe that the UNHCR-recognized refugees are receiving inadequate assistance for fear that better treatment will result in a mass exodus of refugees from the North East to Delhi.<sup>9</sup> As stated in a letter of 4 December 1995 from D. McNamara, Director, Division of International Protection, UNHCR Geneva: 'UNHCR would be ready to assist the Chin refugees in the Mizoram state if allowed to do so by the authorities. However, we do not believe that individual assistance in

New Delhi would address the plight of the group. It might on the contrary aggravate the situation by drawing large numbers of refugees to New Delhi where we do not have the capacity or resources to meet their needs adequately.<sup>10</sup>

As of June 1997 there were 467 officially-recognized Burmese refugees in the country. Most of them are student activists who left Burma during the 1988 uprising. In Delhi, the refugees are concentrated in the western suburb, Janakpuri. Recognized Burmese refugees comprise a small minority in a total UNHCR caseload of about 25,000, the majority of whom are Afghans.

**U**nlike Tibetan refugees, the government does not permit Burmese refugees to acquire residential and other legal documents. In the North East, displaced Burmese nationals experience deportation, extortion, and harassment because they lack formal legal status. Even UNHCR-recognized refugees experience considerable hardship and problems. Without formal legal standing in India, they cannot assimilate and find secure employment.

In 1996, UNHCR sub-contracted the Public Interest Legal Support And Research Center (PILSARC), an Indian NGO, to provide legal services to the refugees. According to a UNHCR legal officer, refugees can approach their office with legal problems and will be referred, if necessary, to PILSARC. However, no refugee SAHRDC spoke with, including community leaders, had ever heard of the group or consulted with it. Many refugees are so disillusioned with the UNHCR that they are convinced that official refugee status is only arbitrarily awarded. Refugee groups and NGOs involved in Burmese affairs are unclear as to UNHCR's criteria and procedures to

bestow or deny refugee status. Most complained of unfair treatment during their UNHCR interview.

Many Burmese refugees who had fled to India in 1988 but who did not apply for UNHCR status until 1994 or after, told SAHRDC that they were either viewed suspiciously, rejected, or not awarded financial assistance.<sup>11</sup> Some did not immediately travel to Delhi to apply for official status because prior to then they had been relatively secure. Until the crackdowns began, most preferred to remain in Mizoram or Manipur where they could speak the local languages, blend in, work, and be closer to home.

According to UNHCR's global guidelines, any refugee claimant may appeal a negative decision concerning refugee status. UNHCR must also inform the claimant why his/her application has been rejected.<sup>12</sup> In at least three cases, the claimants were not given any reasons why their applications were refused. On condition of anonymity, a UNHCR staff member stated that in India the agency does not reveal the reason for rejection to applicants because 'it sparks debate.'

**O**ne of the claimants whose application was refused by UNHCR, Lia Lian Thang (R 3883), was forced to flee to India in 1992 because his brother was involved with the CNF. He arrived in Delhi in January 1993 and participated in a hunger strike when his UNHCR application was rejected. He was interviewed twice and rejected both times. He went to UNHCR 10 times before receiving the final decision in September 1995. He claimed that he was never informed why he was rejected and that his appeal interview lasted only five minutes. Today, he has no stable place to live and no means of support. He depends on the kindness of friends and colleagues for his survival.

UNHCR legal officers aver that asylum-seekers are granted an interview within a fortnight of making an application, with results to be expected in one month, if not sooner. The maximum amount of time an applicant may have to wait is two months. They complain that delays in awarding status are the fault of asylum seekers who have not responded to their appointment slips or who have not received them. Nonetheless, in a letter dated 3 March 1997, the CRC provided UNHCR with a list of 15 refugees who had been initially rejected. No response had been made to their appeal letters and some had been waiting for one-and-a-half years. Many asylum-seekers miss appointments through no fault of their own. The most common reason being that the letter does not reach them in time. Usually, only about one week prior notice is given for UNHCR appointments.

**O**ver the past few years, several hunger strikes have been staged in front of UNHCR's offices to protest the unfair treatment of Burmese asylum-seekers. The first such strike was launched on 14 November 1995 by seven families. In June 1995, UNHCR had asked them to come to Delhi. Four months later, their applications were rejected. Although the then Deputy Chief of Mission had promised to respond to their appeals by 24 November 1995, his response was delayed twice.<sup>13</sup> The refugees ultimately met with second and final rejections. At that time, some applicants acquiesced and returned to the North East.

By May 1996, after waiting for over one year and being joined in their protest, many in the group obtained official refugee status. However, in a sudden departure from previous practice, the UNHCR would only offer a one-time grant of Rs 4,300<sup>14</sup> for the round-trip travel expenses. Despite



receiving warnings by Chin refugees and some NGOs of increased border insurgency and unrest, UNHCR urged the hunger strikers to return to Mizoram and said they would be safe.<sup>15</sup>

For financial reasons, most hunger strikers had no choice but to give up their struggle. In July 1996, they returned to Mizoram hoping that their certificates would protect them. Unfortunately, many were caught up in the July and August 1996 crackdowns. Ro Thla Peng (BU 224), a refugee who had participated in the hunger strikes, was arrested in Aizawl by the CID on 10 August 1996. He was beaten by the police and threatened with deportation unless he left Mizoram.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, he went into hiding and eventually made his way back to Delhi.

**A**ccording to UNHCR's Determination of Refugee Status, a recognized refugee has the right not to be sent back to the country of origin (refouled).<sup>17</sup> In December 1995, five SLORC soldiers defected to the CNF. Six more defected in July 1996. They were part of the LIG (Light Infantry Group) 268 and 269. After staying in the North East for several weeks, they travelled to Delhi to seek UNHCR protection. The first group of five defectors obtained UNHCR refugee status. The second group had been interviewed and their status decision pending when an Indian intelligence agent visited the New Delhi office of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).<sup>18</sup> There he told the staff that the defectors had to leave the city because of India's policy on deserters and security threats. He suggested that they return to Mizoram where they could be protected in a camp. Ko Naing, President of the Democratic Students of Burma, offered to accompany the defectors back to the North East. After the army defectors and Ko

Naing left with the Indian intelligence agent, they went missing.

At the end of August 1996, it was learnt that the Indian government had handed them over to the Burmese Army at the North East Command.<sup>19</sup> Of the UNHCR-recognized refugees, some are believed to have been sentenced to death. Others have received sentences ranging from seven years to life in prison.<sup>20</sup> Ko Naing was seen several months later in Monywa jail in Upper Burma. He is reportedly kept in a dark cell with his hands and legs tied up. He is paralyzed from the waist down from severe torture. In a state of severe mental instability, he is unwilling to speak to anyone.

The UNHCR claims that it learnt of the refoulement only after it happened. Informed sources revealed, however, that UNHCR had received prior notification and told Burmese groups that if India (the host government) wanted to take action against any recognized refugee, their office 'could not do much.'

**U**nder a sub-contracting agreement with UNHCR, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) has been responsible for all refugee education and training courses since early 1996. Before 1996, UNHCR had its own English language classes. Without exception, every Burmese refugee surveyed by SAHRDC wanted to improve his/her English language ability. However, most neither knew about the YMCA English language courses nor where they took place. Of the six people interviewed who had at one time registered for either UNHCR or YMCA classes, half dropped out because they felt the classes were not useful and of poor quality.

Although nearly 40% of the refugees interviewed indicated an interest in taking Hindi classes, neither refugees nor their leaders were

aware that the YMCA also offered them or that they were free. The majority of refugees stated that they could not take either language course because of child care responsibilities or because they could not afford the bus fare. Some also expressed doubt about the quality of the courses as also their ability to follow the instructions. According to the service providers, Burmese refugees do not participate in YMCA language training because they organise their own classes.<sup>21</sup> This is not so. Occasionally, an alternative for them has existed (for example, until January 1997, English classes were sponsored by the Other Media, the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the British High Commission). However, the only Hindi language courses available are those offered by the YMCA.

**I**n 1996, YMCA was sub-contracted by the UNHCR to provide vocational training. The objective was to further refugee self-reliance and assimilation through work and income-generating activities. Some of the vocational activities offered by the YMCA are: beauty culture, tailoring, motor mechanics, television technology, refrigerator repair, airticketing, baking and cooking, and computers. All courses are of a six month duration. Since the YMCA assumed responsibility for training, only a few refugees have completed vocational courses. As of June 1997, YMCA claimed that two refugees were enrolled in beauty culture, two in television repair and one in a photography class that had not yet started. However, when SAHRDC visited the beauty culture class, only one Burmese, Aye Win, was in attendance.

Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women cautions against targeting marginal economic activities for which there is no sustainable market.<sup>22</sup> However, the YMCA offers gender-biased courses such as beauty

culture, baking and cooking which have not led to economic self sufficiency. Child care and domestic duties also play a key role in preventing women from participating in training programmes. As per UNHCR global guidelines, provision of child care facilities is a good mechanism to boost refugee women's participation in rehabilitation programmes.<sup>23</sup> Although there is day-care at the YMCA Vikas-puri education center, Burmese refugees are not aware of it.

**I**n 1996, along with training and education, UNHCR sub-contracted the YMCA to handle the needs assessment arm of its rehabilitation programme, which includes home visits and the determination of special assistance (UNHCR financial assistance). According to UNHCR project officers, there are three circumstances under which Burmese refugees will not receive special assistance: when they are found not to be in residence; when they are lump sum recipients; and when they have been in India for six or seven years before applying for protection.

Although many YMCA and UNHCR officials complained that Burmese refugees were not at home when they visited, most of the refugees had legitimate excuses. One quarter of the 40 refugees interviewed in Janakpuri do not have a permanent address and frequently shift residence to decrease the burden of their support on any one household. Many also stay away from the home during the day (when the YMCA conducts its home visits), so as to lessen their imposition on the family they are staying with.

There are some refugees who reside in the North East but who come to Delhi only to pick up their special assistance. However, this occurs only in small numbers and for a combination of economic and political rea-

sons. Burmese refugees point out that their UNHCR certificates specify their 'stay in India', not their stay in Delhi. They claim that the special assistance policy is unclear and inconsistent. For example, some know of refugees who are receiving special assistance in Bangalore, while one individual had his special assistance cut because he lives in a town six hours from Delhi.

**A**s per current practice, a primary applicant refugee (head of household) receives Rs 1200 per month as subsistence allowance (SA) and collects Rs 500 per month for each of the first three dependents. The fourth, fifth, and sixth dependents are allotted Rs 400 each and the seventh and eighth dependents Rs 200 each. Those who receive SA must struggle to make this amount stretch to cover rent, utilities, and food. In one large family, a refugee confided that to make ends meet, a young female relative had resorted to prostitution.

As of the end of April 1997, of the total registered Burmese caseload, 249 persons (103 cases) did not receive any SA. Of these cases, a 'few' were well-employed or self-reliant and 89 persons (70 cases) were lump sum grant recipients.<sup>24</sup> There were 160 persons (33 cases) who had neither received SA nor taken the lump sum. UNHCR's figures indicate that 55% of the Burmese refugee community do not receive SA. Refugees claimed that they are repeatedly threatened with the termination of their SA.<sup>25</sup> Several months ago, for example, Benjamin Tang Neng (BU 232) had his SA cut arbitrarily. When he inquired, he was told that he was 'not eligible' and no other reason was offered. On a visit to the UNHCR office, he was told that his SA was cut because he is a Chin (which he is not). Only after about 10 visits to UNHCR offices his financial assistance was resumed.

On a visit to UNHCR sponsored medical facilities, a researcher saw a notice that was dated 17 April 1997.<sup>26</sup> It stated that that starting 1 May 1997 there would be a new schedule for picking up SA whereby the Burmese would have only one day to collect. Furthermore, 'SA and other assistance not collected within the (given) date will be canceled.' Most refugees never go to the medical facility where the policy notice was posted. Moreover, only two weeks time was given between the date of posting and the date the policy came into effect. Some refugees, unaware of this new policy, lost their family's two full month SA. This was financially catastrophic.

UNHCR/YMCA maintains that SA is not stopped when refugees earn extra income. They told us that refugees are permitted to earn small amounts, about Rs 700 per month, without having their SA cut. Even if they earned more, for example, Rs 1500 per month, SA would continue for some months. However, it was not made clear when and under what circumstances SA would be cut, that the decision would be made on a case-by-case basis. Interestingly, when refugees were told what the service providers claimed, they responded with disbelief and amusement. Many cited examples of people whose SA was cut, even though the money they earned was within the permitted amounts.

**A**bout one third of the entire Burmese caseload are lump sum grant recipients. Introduced in 1993, the lump sum programme aims to provide refugees with capital to establish a small business and attain financial self sufficiency. The lump sum amount, given in one capital transfer, is equivalent to one year's worth of SA. As of the end of April 1997, 89 persons (70 cases) had taken the lump sum and gone to the North East where it was cheaper

to live and launch a business.<sup>27</sup> Most used up the money quickly to repay debts or to help family members and others in the community. Without having any prior business experience, support services, or monitoring, the businesses failed. This ill-conceived programme had unfair and far reaching consequences for the refugees: once the lump sum grant was taken, a refugee is never again eligible to receive SA or any other financial assistance from UNHCR.

**F**emale primary applicants are generally allocated the same SA as a man. However, if she later marries, she is downgraded to a dependent and receives only Rs 500 per month. If a refugee man marries either a refugee or a non-refugee woman, he still receives his SA plus an additional Rs 500 per month for his wife. This policy contradicts UN principles and discriminates against both women and married couples. It unequally bestows benefits on men, thereby reinforcing sexist notions and creates a situation of dependency for wives. Moreover, it supports the traditional stereotype that women are domestic and dependent while men are the breadwinners active in the public sphere.

Under a sub-contracting agreement made with UNHCR in January 1996, the Voluntary Health Association of Delhi (VHAD) assumed responsibility to administer health services to all Delhi-based refugees. Due to confusion, misunderstanding and, in some cases, dislike for anything connected with the UNHCR, most refugees interviewed had never visited the clinic and instead preferred to visit either the health clinic managed by the Women's Relief and Welfare Association of Burma (WRWAB) in Janakpuri (popularly called the 'Burmese clinic') or seek assistance from other health professionals.

Some positive steps have been taken towards more effective outreach and participation regarding health. For example, when Leena Saxena, the medical social worker at the VHAD Vikaspuri noticed that few Burmese were coming to the clinic she accompanied social workers on home visits in Janakpuri. While there, she visited the Burmese clinic and consulted with the doctors. Another recent initiative taken by VHAD is the hiring of Burmese as health assistants to facilitate communication between the Vikaspuri center and the refugee community. As of July 1997, arrangements for the health assistants were not yet finalized.

**A**lthough the UNHCR's global mandate is to provide educational assistance only up to the 10th standard, under its special assistance programme, educational aid is offered to credible 11th and 12th standard students. However, the criteria to be deemed 'credible' is neither understood nor spelt out. Fortunately, other international groups contribute funds for refugees to pursue higher education, though not enough to meet demand. As part of its sub-contracting agreement with the UNHCR, YMCA implements the educational assistance programme.

As with the YMCA's vocational training programme, many refugee parents are not aware of the educational benefits available for their children. When asked, both YMCA and UNHCR that they were currently in the process of writing policies and guidelines and an information sheet on educational assistance.

Many children receiving assistance from the YMCA attend the Savior Convent school, which has the largest number of Burmese refugee children in Delhi (roughly 34 pupils). Through other funds the WRWAB man-

ages its own primary school with 22 students in the 1st through 4th standard. After completing primary school, children enter the Indian school system.<sup>28</sup> Despite this assistance, the refugees struggle to educate their children. The parents also stated that they are forced to meet significant costs for transportation and uniforms out of their own pockets.

**I**n addition, there are other barriers to education. Sometimes students are barred from admission because they missed several years of schooling when they fled SLORC's oppression. Teachers complain that language and cultural barriers demand more attention than they are able to give.

Further, according to UNHCR policy, if a child is more than four years behind in school, they are termed 'over-age'. Over-age children are ineligible for the general education reimbursement programme. Consequently, some refugee children are unable to access their full rights to development and equality as stated under the Convention of the Rights on the Child (CRC) to which India is a signatory. When asked what other educational options existed, the UNHCR project officer for education pointed to the 'open school system' which is recommended for 'over-age' students aged 15-20 years. Although UNHCR covers 90% of the costs, the refugees are unaware of the programme.

Under its global policy, UNHCR provides financial assistance to those who can prove they were eligible to be refugees when forced to flee. 65% of those who fled Burma and came to India were high school students at the time of the 1988 military coup. Others were at various stages in their undergraduate and graduate-level studies.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, most cannot prove their qualifications because they did not bring educational certifi-

cates with them. Even with generous grants from international sources, it is difficult for most of them to meet living costs while pursuing higher education.

Until 1995, Indian universities were closed to Burmese refugees. Although they are now permitted to take Indian placement tests, they must pay foreigner's fees. The other option, for Christian refugees such as the Chins, are the Bible and Seminary institutes which have relatively low tuition fees and offer work-study programmes.

**P** rinciples of respect and sensitivity in dealing with refugees are specified in UNHCR guidelines. However, research reveals that such principles are not being adequately observed by UNHCR in India.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a lack of communication, outreach, and accessibility exists in the services provided by both UNHCR and its subcontractors.

That the vast majority of Burmese refugees see UNHCR as unresponsive, arbitrary, or inefficient. More than a quarter of the 40 survey respondents mentioned that they had been made to feel low or inferior. 'They treat us like criminals, like homeless people. We feel insulted by them,' spoke one refugee leader.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, only about a quarter of the respondents indicated that they had at least one experience with a UNHCR staff person that they would characterize as 'nice' or 'OK'.

The minority of refugees who are aware of, and who access, services are largely unsatisfied with them. UNHCR does not have an effective procedure for attaining self-reliance through its financial assistance and training interventions. Programmes and policies lack clarity, follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation. Sometimes refugees report a reluctance to

access medical, training, or legal services because of other negative experiences or overall frustration with UNHCR.

**A**s observed, international standards are frequently overlooked in the provision of education and health services. Moreover, in their provision of SA, UNHCR India's policy discriminates against women. Finally, in many areas, there is a disturbing gap between what the UNHCR claims that it carries out and provides for the refugees and ground level realities.

#### Endnotes

1. *No Protection for Burma's Refugees*, Burma Relief Center, November 1996, Thailand. A good number of these refugees have returned or have been returned to Burma. Amnesty International states that there are currently 200,000 outside of Burma (*A New Human Rights Problem for ASEAN*, 22 July 1997, Amnesty International). The Forum of Democratic Leaders in Asia-Pacific (FDL-AP) estimates that two million Burmese national have been displaced by the SLORC regime (*Burmese Refugees Today*, 12 November 1996 by Harn Yawnghwe.)
2. Sources for this section: *Negative and Positive Aspects of Staying in India*, ABSL, 1996; *Burma Student's Movement in India*, ABSL, 1994; *A Report on Burmese Political Activists in Mizoram*, ABSL, 1994; SAHRDC interview with ABSL members Myat Thu and Soe Myint; 'Influx by Myanmar Nationals Causes Concern', *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, 9 February 1992.
3. *The Sentinel*, 9 February 1992.
4. *Ibid.* and 'Muslim Influx from Myanmar Continues', *The Hindu*, Delhi, 31 January 1992.
5. India's Foreigner's Act of 1946 is a law to treat as fugitive those without valid travel documents. This results in the imprisonment of those seeking asylum, in contravention of UN Convention on Refugees, until such point as they can be determined refugees by the UNHCR or the Government of India.
6. Criminal Investigation Department.
7. 'SLORC's Visit to India', *North East Sun Magazine*, India, 12-18 September 1992; 'India Backs Down on Burmese Issues', *The Nation*, Bangkok, 2 September 1992.
8. Annual Report: 1995-96, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 16, paragraph 3.44.

9. Interview with Victor Blak Lian, CRC and other refugee interviews.
10. Letter to Clement John of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, 4 December 1995.
11. Interview with UNHCR project officers.
12. *Determination of Refugee Status*, Training with UNHCR Series, Training Module of UNHCR, RLD 2, 1st edition, 1989, p. 30, 32; and *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status*. Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, 1979, p. 46.
13. UNHCR letter reference number HCR/LG/22.6/446.
14. US \$ 1 = Rs 36.42.
15. *Chin Refugees in Mizoram (India): Jailed, Tortured and Threatened with Deportation to Myanmar*, CRC paper; and 14 August 1996 letter to H.D. Deve Gowda, then Prime Minister of India, from Dunu Roy (provided to SAHRDC by the CRC).
16. 11 February 1997 letter from Soe Myint, ABSL, to Irene Khan, UNHCR India Chief of Mission; and 22 April 1996 letter to UNHCR from Ro Thla Peng.
17. *Determination of Refugee Status*, Training with UNHCR Series, Training Module of UNHCR, RLD 2, 1st edition, 1989.
18. National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, the rightfully elected government-in-exile.
19. 'Burmese Students Plea to Government of India', *The Hindu*, 7 November 1996, and Interview with Soe Myint, ABSL.
20. *Fist* Newsletter, ABSL, 1996; and interview with Soe Myint, ABSL.
21. Interviews with YMCA and UNHCR.
22. *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee-Women*, UNHCR, Geneva, July 1991, pp. 58-59.
23. *Ibid.* par.110, p. 56.
24. *Burmese Refugees: Need for a Solution-oriented Approach: Note for the file*, Internal UNHCR report, April 1997.
25. Interview with Victor Blak Lian, Soe Myint, and other refugees.
26. VHAD Malviya Nagar clinic, another community-based center such as the one in Vikaspuri.
27. *Burmese Refugees*. Op. cit. fn. 24.
28. Interview with Mya Mya Aye, WRWB.
29. *A Report on Educational Programmes of Burmese Students in India*, ABSL, 1995.
30. *Interviewing Applicants for Refugee Status*, Training with UNHCR Series, RLD 4, 1995.
31. Interview with Myat Thu, ABSL.

# People without a country

NATHAN A LIMPET

WHILE statelessness has long been recognized as an important problem in international law, the desire of states to exercise control over stateless persons in their jurisdictions has prevented effective action. The 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons has attracted only 27 signatories, and a mere 15 states have ratified the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The indifference of national governments and the inaction of the international community has affected a large number of persons who are particularly vulnerable to oppression because they lack the protection afforded by rights of citizenship. The stateless are 'denied the vehicle for access to fundamental rights, access to protection and access to expression as person(s) under the law.'

Nowhere is the problem of statelessness more acute than in South and South East Asia. Sri Lankan repa-

trates in India, Burmese refugees in Thailand, Vietnamese refugees in Cambodia, and many ethnic Chinese in all parts of South East Asia are currently stateless and thus especially vulnerable to the same types of human rights abuses as those suffered by the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh. Part I of this report traces the history of international law on stateless persons. Part II examines the particular circumstances of the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh and assesses their claims to Indian citizenship under both international and Indian law. Finally, Part III documents human rights abuses suffered by the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh as a result of their stateless condition.

## I

The state is not a private club which can induct or expel members arbi-

trarily. Rather, the development of customary international law has placed certain limitations upon states as regards the conferment of citizenship. The 1930 Hague Convention was one of the first documents to recognize these limitations. Article I of the convention states: 'It is for each state to determine under its own law who are its nationals. This law shall be recognized by other states *in so far as it is consistent with international conventions, international custom, and the principles of law generally recognized with regard to nationality*.'<sup>2</sup>

**T**herefore, decisions upon the acquisition or loss of nationality will be recognized only insofar as they are consistent with contemporary international legal norms. Currently, these norms are expressed in the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (entered into force 1960) and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (entered into force 1975). Prior to the 1954 Convention, statelessness was viewed merely as an indication of one's status as a refugee. The mandate of the 1946 Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees did not mention statelessness at all, and thus the committee 'regard(ed) *de jure* and *de facto* statelessness merely as one of the criteria of eligibility (for refugee status) in conjunction with others, e.g. flight into another state as a result of racial, political or religious persecution.'<sup>3</sup>

As the definition of 'refugee' was being continually narrowed during the 1940s, many stateless persons could no longer receive the protection afforded by the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees, the Intergovernmental Commission for Refugees, or the International Refugee Organization.<sup>4</sup> This led the Commission on Human Rights to request that 'early consideration be given by

the United Nations to the legal status of persons who do not enjoy the protection of any Government, in particular pending the acquisition of nationality, as regards their legal and social protection and their documentation.'<sup>5</sup>

Seven years were to pass, however, before the UN was to take action upon this recommendation. During the consideration of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the problem of statelessness was put aside for lack of time: 'In view of the urgency of the refugee problem and the responsibility of the United Nations in this field, the Committee decided to address itself first to the problem of refugees, whether stateless or not, and to leave to later stages of its deliberations the problems of stateless persons who are not refugees.'<sup>6</sup> This is a recurring theme in the development of statelessness rights in international law; the stateless have been neglected because their concerns have been viewed as ancillary to greater problems.

**T**he 1954 Convention was an early attempt to deal with the problem of statelessness in its own right. The convention requires states to grant stateless persons many of the same rights accorded to citizens under national law. It also protects stateless persons from expulsion in all but exceptional circumstances. However, through an apparent oversight,<sup>7</sup> no provision was made for a supervisory body similar to the UN High Commission for Refugees.

Additionally, the definition of a stateless person, 'a person who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law',<sup>8</sup> excludes large numbers of persons who have no *effective* nationality. For example, among the massive numbers of 'boat people' from Vietnam were ethnic

Chinese who had never set foot in either mainland China (PRC) or Taiwan (ROC). The People's Republic does not recognize them at all, and the ROC grants them merely 'overseas nationality'. Those granted overseas nationality have no necessary right of entry or residence in Taiwan. Thus, while these ethnic Chinese are technically considered nationals under Taiwanese law, they receive none of the benefits of citizenship and are effectively stateless. Nonetheless, they are not considered stateless persons under the 1954 Convention.<sup>9</sup>

**T**he 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness defined stateless persons in the same manner as had the 1954 Convention. Additionally, unlike the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, this convention was not convened for the purpose of providing assistance to a specific group of people. The authors of the convention tended to view their work as little more than codifying existing practice regarding the recognition of nationality judgements.<sup>10</sup> Further, a proposal to create an independent tribunal for stateless persons to press nationality claims was quickly squashed.<sup>11</sup>

A document drafted under such conditions was not likely to greatly improve the condition of stateless persons, nor has it. However, Article 11 of the convention did provide for a relief agency to deal with the problems of the stateless. UNHCR was charged with the responsibilities of Article 11, and thus the problem of statelessness was again connected to, and to some degree overshadowed by, the concerns of refugees.

For nearly 30 years following the 1961 Convention, the problem of statelessness was given little attention by the international community. The right of all persons to a nationality was reiterated in the International Conven-

tion on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but again, no specific measures or procedures were mandated. And although the provisions of the 1985 Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals who are not nationals of the country in which they live applied to stateless persons and established the fundamental rights of aliens, the declaration was addressed to aliens more generally (especially guest workers) and did not elaborate upon or even mention the fundamental right to a nationality established by Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The issue of citizenship has received greater attention recently in response to the nationality legislation of the newly created states of Central Asia and the former Yugoslavia. In response to the growing numbers of stateless persons, the executive committee of the High Commissioner's programme has recommended that UNHCR: 'strengthen its efforts in this domain, including promoting accession to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, training for UNHCR staff and government officials, and a systematic gathering of information on the dimension of the problem, and to keep the Executive Committee informed of these activities.'<sup>12</sup>

**F**urther, the executive committee has adopted a Conclusion on The Prevention of and Reduction of Statelessness and The Protection of Stateless Persons which reiterates the need for UNHCR to more actively promote the welfare of stateless persons.<sup>13</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has also noted that UNHCR has a 'special responsibility' for stateless persons and that his office '...has been designated as an interme-

diary between states and stateless persons under the 1961 Convention. Most recently, UNHCR has been requested by its executive committee to place the matter of statelessness on its agenda. We will explore promotional and preventive activities to which UNHCR can contribute in collaboration with concerned states. There is an obvious link between the loss or denial of national protection and the loss or denial of nationality. On the plane of rights, the prevention and reduction of statelessness is an important aspect of securing minority rights.'<sup>14</sup>

## II

The Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh belong to a tribal group which has for centuries inhabited the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Despite the fact that most of the inhabitants of the CHT are either Buddhist or Hindu, the region became a part of Pakistan with the partition of India in 1947. Since this time, the Chakmas and other non-Muslim tribal groups of the CHT have faced extensive and well-documented oppression at the hands of the various Islamic governments.<sup>15</sup> In 1964, communal violence and the construction of the Kaptai hydro-electric dam displaced nearly 100,000 Chakmas. A large number of these sought refuge in India.

Approximately 35,000<sup>16</sup> of them were given valid migration certificates and settled in what was then the North East Frontier Agency, today the Arunachal districts of Lohit, Changlang, and Papumpare.<sup>17</sup> These migration certificates indicated *legal entry* into India and the willingness of the government to accept the Chakmas as future citizens, much like migrants from Pakistan following Partition. Nearly 1,000 members of the Hajong tribe, a Hindu group from the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh, were also settled in these areas and granted migration certificates.

In the more than 30 years since their resettlement, the Chakmas and Hajongs have built villages, developed the land granted to them, and established strong ties to the region. Additionally, they have become integrated into the social fabric of the state of Arunachal Pradesh. They have voted in state elections and paid state taxes on their land. Many of them, now numbering about 65,000 persons, were born in India and know no other home. It is against this background that their claims for Indian citizenship are to be considered.

Section 5(1)(a) of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1955 as amended by Act No. 51 of 1986 states that: '(a) persons of Indian origin who are ordinarily resident in India and have been resident for five years immediately before making an application for registration shall be eligible to be registered as citizens of India.' Also, Sections 3(1) and 3(1)a state that: 'Except as provided in sub-section (2), every person born in India, (a) on or after the 26th day of January, 1950, but before the commencement of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 1986, shall be a citizen of India by birth.'<sup>18</sup>

**T**here can be no question that the Chakmas and Hajongs are of Indian origin and have been residing in Arunachal Pradesh for more than 30 years. Under the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972, it was determined that India and not Bangladesh would be responsible for all migrants who entered India before 25 March 1971. Furthermore, the central government has often asserted that the Chakmas and Hajongs have a legitimate claim to Indian citizenship. In a letter dated 23 September 1992, minister of state for home and parliamentary affairs, M.M. Jacob stated: 'Being "new migrants", viz., refugees from Bangladesh who came to India between 1964 and 1971,

they are eligible to the grant of citizenship according to the policy of the government on the subject and most of these migrants have already been granted citizenship.'

More recently, in 1994, minister of state P.M. Sayeed stated: 'Under the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972, it was decided that the Chakma/Hajong refugees who came to India from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) before 25.3.71 will be considered for grant of Indian citizenship.'<sup>19</sup> Further, a very large proportion of these refugees would have been born in India and, therefore, would be automatically entitled to the grant of citizenship.<sup>20</sup>

But of even greater significance is the Supreme Court ruling in *National Human Rights Commission v. State of Arunachal Pradesh*,<sup>21</sup> a case which bears close scrutiny. The case arose in response to allegations of human rights abuses suffered by the Chakmas and Hajongs at the hands of the state government of Arunachal Pradesh in collaboration with private entities like the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union.

In September and October of 1994 the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCAP) made numerous appeals to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), alleging human rights abuses and imminent threats to their lives and property. Upon inquiry, the NHRC determined that the Arunachal state government was acting in concert with the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) to issue 'quit notices' with a view to intimidating the Chakmas and Hajongs and expelling them from the state. In view of the state government's dilatory statements and inadequate responses to the inquiries and directions of the NHRC, the matter was brought before the

Supreme Court. The Supreme Court in its interim order on 2 November 1995, directed the state government to 'ensure that the Chakmas and Hajongs situated in its territory are not ousted by any coercive action, not in accordance with law.'

In its final order, after concluding that there was indeed an imminent threat to the lives and property of the Chakmas and Hajongs (an issue which will be dealt with below), the Supreme Court distinguished the case at bar from that of *State of Arunachal Pradesh v. Khudiram Chakma*.<sup>22</sup> In *State of Arunachal Pradesh v. Khudiram Chakma*, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the state government in a dispute over land rights between the state and 57 Chakma families.

The question of the Chakmas' citizenship was a salient feature of this dispute because only citizens were permitted to purchase land in protected areas under the Foreigners Order of 1948.<sup>23</sup> As Arunachal Pradesh was declared a protected area under the Government of India Act, 1935,<sup>24</sup> the Chakma families' acquisition of lands outside the Chakma Allotment Areas would be valid only if they were found to be citizens of India. Under the Assam Accord, codified at Section 6-A of the Citizenship Act, the Chakmas were found to be non-citizens as they were not ordinarily resident in Assam, but rather in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>25</sup>

In the *NHRC v. State of Arunachal Pradesh*, the Supreme Court stated that the question of citizenship by registration under Section 5(1)a of the Act was based upon considerations which were 'entirely different' from those operative in *State of Arunachal Pradesh v. Khudiram Chakma*.<sup>26</sup> While the terms of the Assam Accord limited its application to a small number of persons, Section 5(1)a was

found to be a provision with general application. As the Chakmas and Hajongs clearly met the requirements of the Act, the court affirmed their right to apply for citizenship under Section 5(1)a and ordered the state government to take steps to facilitate their registration.<sup>27</sup>

The Citizenship Rules of 1956 define the process by which an individual may become a citizen of India under Section 5(1)a of the Act. The rules describe the form that any citizenship application must take as well as creating the office of the collector, who is responsible for collecting and transmitting citizenship applications to the central government. Rule 8 reads, in its entirety: 'The authority to register a person as a citizen of India under these rules shall be the central government.'<sup>28</sup> In *Shamin Bano v. Union of India*,<sup>29</sup> the Supreme Court indicated that questions of citizenship are the exclusive domain of the central government and that no other body, not even the court itself, could constitutionally interfere with the government's determinations in this area.<sup>30</sup>

Reiterating this position and clarifying the role of the collector in *NHRC v. State of Arunachal Pradesh*, the Supreme Court stated: 'On a conjoint reading of Rules 8 and 9 it becomes clear that the collector has merely to receive the application and forward it to the central government. It is the only authority constituted under Rule 8 which is empowered to register a person as a citizen of India. It follows that only that authority can refuse to entertain an application made under Section 5 of the Act.'<sup>31</sup>

This explanation was necessary because of the dilatory and dishonest behaviour of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The district collector (DC) refused to forward the citi-



zenship applications of the Chakmas and Hajongs to the central government for a judgement. According to the state government the DC had the power to make initial determinations as to the merits of a citizenship application. Further, these determinations had already been made: 'It is submitted that the applications, if any, made in this regard have already been disposed of after necessary enquiry. There is no application pending before the DC.'<sup>32</sup> The Supreme Court noted that this position was in direct contradiction to the stance taken by the state before the NHRC in 1995. The court then proceeded to instruct the state government and the DC to forward the citizenship applications of the Chakmas and Hajongs as was required by the Act.

**D**espite this clear and unambiguous ruling of the Supreme Court, the Chakmas and Hajongs could not apply their citizenship due to fear created by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union. The Chakmas and Hajongs submitted their applications directly to the central government in February 1997. The Union home ministry forwarded the citizenship applications to the district collectors for necessary verification. At the time of publishing this report, no verification was conducted by the district collectors. The state government continues to defy the Supreme Court, the central government, and the rule of law. For this reason the Chakmas and Hajongs continue to be denied the citizenship rights and constitutional protections that they so desperately need and justly deserve. After more than 30 years of statelessness, the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh remain a people without a country.

The Committee on Petitions of

the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Indian Parliament, after on the spot investigation, interviewing the victims and the state government of Arunachal Pradesh, recommended on 14 August 1997 that: '41. The committee feels that the spirit of the Indira-Mujib Accord as well as the judgement of the Supreme Court in the matter may be made applicable to all the affected states for the solution of the problem. As per the accord, all those Chakmas who came to India prior to 25.03.1971 are to be granted Indian citizenship.

'42. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh who came there prior to 25.03.1971 be granted Indian citizenship. The committee also recommends that those Chakmas who have been born in India should also be considered for Indian citizenship. The committee further recommends that the fate of those Chakmas who came to the state after 25.3.1971 be discussed and decided by the central government and state government jointly. The committee also recommends that all the old applications of Chakmas for citizenship which have either been rejected or withheld by deputy commissioners or the state government continue to block the forwarding of such applications to central government, the central government may consider to incorporate necessary provisions in the rules (or the act if so required) whereby it could directly receive, consider and decide the application for citizenship in the case of Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh.

'The committee also recommends that Chakmas be also considered for granting them the status of Scheduled Tribes at the time of granting the citizenship. The committee would like to earnestly urge upon the central government and state government to ensure that until amicable solution is arrived at, the Chakmas are allowed to stay in Arunachal Pradesh

with full protection and safety, honour and dignity.'

### III

The failure of the Indian government to extend the protections of Indian citizenship to the Chakmas and Hajongs is not only a violation of Indian municipal law, but of international law as well. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that 'everyone has the right to a nationality.'<sup>33</sup> India has acceded to two conventions which create an obligation to abide by the declaration in this area. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights declares that 'every child has the right to acquire a nationality.'<sup>34</sup>

**F**urther, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 7(1) reads: 'The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality, and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.'<sup>35</sup> Clearly, India has not fulfilled these obligations in the cases of the thousands of Chakma and Hajong children born in Arunachal Pradesh since 1964. Many further violations of international law have resulted from this initial failure, and it is to these issues that this report now turns.

The list of human rights abuses which follows is a direct result of the fact that the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh have been without the protection of the laws of any state for the past 30 years. The indifference of the Centre to the plight of these people and the inability of the Chakmas and Hajongs to receive redress flow directly from their stateless condition.

Additionally, their statelessness has made them more susceptible to oppression at the hands of the state government and the local populace.

Had the Chakmas and Hajongs been granted Indian citizenship nearly 30 years ago as promised, they would have been more fully integrated into the social fabric of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and, released from the obligation to remain in allotment areas, would not have been vulnerable to the blockades, state sponsored attacks, and mass evictions which are examined in detail below. It should also be noted that the statements of the NHRC and the Supreme Court which attest to the reality of these abuses have come only in the last three years. Without proper access to the court system, the Chakmas and Hajongs had to wait more than three decades to receive even the protections of Article 21, the right to life. The list of abuses which follows gives a graphic illustration of how statelessness can lead to oppression, indifference, and suffering.

India has acceded to several international human rights conventions including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). By so acceding, India has signalled her intention to abide by international norms regarding the health, security, education and property of all persons within her borders. By turning a blind eye to the actions of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, the Centre has failed to live up to its obligations to protect the Chakmas and Hajongs under international humanitarian law in almost every particular.

**D**iscrimination: Under Article 26 of the ICCPR: 'All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal

and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.'<sup>36</sup>

In March of 1996 the Arunachal Pradesh government issued a White Paper on the Chakma and Hajong migrants. Page four of the white paper states: 'The Chakmas worship evil spirits. They also believe in and perform witchcraft.'<sup>37</sup> The paper goes on to note the Chakmas' 'propensity towards crimes and other anti-social activities.'<sup>38</sup> This is the *official position* of the state government regarding the Chakma people within its borders. It was approved by the Cabinet after 'careful thought and deliberations.'<sup>39</sup> Clearly, the Chakmas and Hajongs cannot expect equitable treatment under such a regime, nor have they received it.

**I**n a circular dated September 1980, the government instructed its various organs that 'no appointment be given to Chakmas/Hajongs/Yobins and Tibetan refugees.... Those who are already in govt. services may continue, but should not be permanent.' In October of 1991 the government issued a circular directing its officers to discontinue the issuance of ration cards to all refugees. These ration cards are funded by the central government for distribution to all persons legally resident in India whose income is lower than a specified amount. Some Chakmas and Hajongs had been holding ration cards since the 1960s. Already living in extreme poverty, the illegal suspension of their ration cards has caused significant hardship.

This most egregious and harmful act of discrimination has gone unremedied for nearly six years. The government has also stopped issuing trade and has taken steps to close down their businesses and confine them to

settlement areas. The Chakmas and Hajongs are denied the equal protection of the laws not only because they are not recognized as citizens, but also because they are largely confined to allotment areas and thus unable to seek redress through the court system.

**F**urther, Article 20(2) of the ICCPR states that 'any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.'<sup>40</sup> In 1994 nearly 2,000 Chakmas were forced to flee the town of Kokila in the wake of a 'Direct Action' rally openly supported by the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh. Similar rallies have been held in the last several years, often precipitating intimidation and violence against the Chakmas and Hajongs. In 1995 the NHRC concluded that the state government had been engaged in various forms of intimidation against the Chakmas and Hajongs, including acting in concert with the AAPSU to issue 'quit notices'.

Additionally, by removing police forces from Chakma and Hajong inhabited areas, the state government has facilitated attacks upon them by the activists of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union. Despite this, the state government has continually stated that it has acted in good faith in providing for their protection. The central government, the NHRC, and the Supreme Court have treated this claim as the bald-faced lie that it is. In 1995, the central government deployed two battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force to ensure their safety. The conclusions of the NHRC have been recounted above. Additionally, when the NHRC brought the state government to trial, the Supreme Court held that the state had not taken adequate steps to protect the lives and liberty of the Chakmas and Hajongs.<sup>41</sup>

Security of person: Numerous allegations of illegal detention, torture, and state supported violence have been levelled against the state government of Arunachal Pradesh. In light of the government's prejudicial attitude and obvious dishonesty, these allegations appear quite believable. Under Article 9 of the ICESCR, India has declared that 'everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.'<sup>42</sup> Further, 'anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him.'<sup>43</sup> And under Article 7 of the ICCPR, 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.'<sup>44</sup>

**O**n 28 January 1996, Phularam Chakma was beaten to death at the Medo Bazaar in Lohit, allegedly by members of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union and the Arunachal Police. No investigation of this crime was ever undertaken by the state authorities. On 7 April 1996, according to the CCRCAP, several Chakma *gaonburas* (village elders) were kidnapped by Arunachal Police for the ostensible purpose of dialogue. This 'dialogue' was rather one-sided, consisting of rough treatment and threats not to apply for citizenship in the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling.

In November 1996, Chakma and Hajong representatives met with members of the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions in Calcutta. Upon returning from Calcutta, they were arrested at Mudhoimukh, Diyun by the Arunachal Police, according to the CCRCAP. No warrant for their arrest

was ever issued, and they were given no reason for their detention. They were questioned about their meeting with Rajya Sabha officials and physically abused. Allegedly, the leaders were beaten intermittently for nearly five hours and relieved of all their money and official documents. They have signed an affidavit to this effect.

**H**ealth: Article 12 of the ICESCR reads, in relevant part: '1. The states Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. 2: The steps to be taken by the states Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for: ... (c) The prevention, treatment and control of epidemic... diseases. (d) The creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness.'

In 1994 a malaria epidemic swept through the Chakma camps at Dharmapur and Vijoypur. During this time, the AAPSU effected an economic blockade of the Chakma refugee camps, preventing the delivery of medical supplies and rations. The epidemic claimed the lives of 144 people. Though the state government denied that the blockade ever existed, an inquiry by the NHRC provided copious evidence of the AAPSU's culpability in this matter as well as the state government's complicity. The Supreme Court has stated, 'The fact that the Chakmas were dying on account of the blockade for want of medicines is an established fact.'<sup>45</sup>

Education: Upon ratification of the ICESCR, India asserted that it recognized the right of everyone to education. Further, it bound itself to the proposition that 'with a view to achieving the full realization of this right: (a) Primary education shall be

compulsory and available free to all; (b) Secondary education in its different forms ... shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.... (e) The development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued....'

Under Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: 'States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) make primary education compulsory and available free to all.'<sup>46</sup>

India not only failed to ensure that the Government of Arunachal Pradesh take positive measures to fulfill these requirements, but sat idle while the state government systematically eliminated all educational opportunities available to the Chakmas and Hajongs. In September 1994 the government began a campaign of school closing, burning, and relocation which has effectively denied the Chakmas and Hajongs their right to education under international law.

**I**n its crusade against the Chakmas and Hajongs the state government has gone so far as to defy the central government. Under the pre-primary education and maturity development scheme, the Centre provides funding for pre-primary schools called *anganwadi* centres. In an action reminiscent of its handling of the Chakma ration cards, the state government has closed down all 35 of these centres in the Chakma areas of Arunachal Pradesh. Seventy teachers are now unemployed and 1,400 children are denied even pre-primary education. It is unclear what has become of the funds provided by the Centre for the operation of these schools.

Property: Article 17 of the UDHR declares that 'no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.' Article 11 of the ICESCR elaborates upon the declaration by providing that 'the States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.'<sup>47</sup> According to the Peoples' Rights Organization, the Chakmas have suffered forcible eviction and arson since the early 1970s.<sup>48</sup> Reports of Chakma houses burned or demolished at the behest of the state government have also appeared in the press and in the reports of other non-governmental organizations.<sup>49</sup> One village in the district of Changlang, Vijoypur, has reportedly been reduced to rubble on three occasions, in 1989, 1994 and 1995.

**B**ut the best documented and most flagrant violation of Indian and international law occurred in January 1997. On 8 January 1997, the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Corporation issued eviction notices to more than 150 Chakma families living in Mpen, a village in Changlang. These notices, back-dated to 31 December 1996, ordered the Chakmas to abandon their houses by 15 January 1997 at which time the state government would demolish their houses and sell their properties at a public auction. These notices were issued on the basis of 'illegal acts' alleged to have been committed by the Chakmas, as well as an October 1995 report of the Mpen Range Manager. Even if this report exists (it has never been made public), neither it nor the commission of 'illegal acts' provide a legal basis for the demolition of the Chakmas' property. The NHRC issued a directive no. 2/12/96 LD on 15 January. This directive

reminded the state government that under the Supreme Court ruling in *NHRC v. State of Arunachal Pradesh*, 'except in accordance with law, the Chakmas shall not be evicted from their homes and shall not be denied domestic life and comfort therein.'<sup>50</sup>

**I**n defiance of both the Supreme Court and the NHRC, on 16 and 17 January 1997, the Forest Corporation destroyed 16 Chakma houses under the supervision of the Range Manager and the Miao police chief. The properties contained in these 16 houses were sold at public auction at Miao on 21 January 1997. When three families attempted to rebuild their houses, the Forest Corporation again evicted them and demolished the structures on 21 January. On 2 February 1997, the Forest Corporation planted trees in the area formerly occupied by the Chakma houses and farms. The families thus evicted had been living on this land since the 1960s.

The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has lied to the central government, to the National Human Rights Commission, and before the Supreme Court. It has defied the orders of all three of these bodies, orders it was constitutionally bound to follow. It is also a government which displays clear ethnic and religious biases. It is to this government that the Centre, the NHRC, and the Supreme Court have abandoned the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh. As they are not citizens of any country, such abandonment has been politically costless. Lacking the protection of any country's law, the ability to participate in political processes, and the other rights and privileges conferred by citizenship, stateless peoples throughout Asia are vulnerable to the same types of abuses as those suffered by the Chakmas and Hajong of Arunachal Pradesh.

## Endnotes

1. Carol A. Batchelor, 'Stateless Persons: Some Gaps in International Protection', *International Journal of Reference Law*, 232, 235 (1995).
2. 179 *League of Nations Treaty Series* 89, 99 (emphasis added).
3. Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, *Statelessness and Some of its Causes: An Outline*, March 1946, at 2.
4. Batchelor, *supra* note 1, at 240.
5. UN-Doc. E/6C0, 1947.
6. *Report of the Ad hoc Committee on Statelessness and Related Problems*, UN Doc. E/1618/Corr. 1, 1950.
7. See Batchelor, *supra* note 1, at 246.
8. *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*, 360 UNTS 117.
9. Batchelor, *supra* note 1, at 233.
10. Batchelor, *supra* note 1, at 252.
11. Batchelor, *supra* note 1, at 254.
12. A/AC.96/839, para. 19(ce), 1994.
13. Conclusion on the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and the Protection of Stateless Persons, A/AC.96/860, 23 October 1995, para. 20.
14. Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Statement at the 51st session of the Commission for Human Rights, 1995.
15. Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, *Life is not Ours*, 25, 1997. See also B.G. Verghese, *India's North East Resurgent*, 1989.
16. NHRC, writ petition in the matter of NHRC v. State of Arunachal Pradesh.
17. People's Rights Organization, *The Question of Indian Citizenship Rights of the Stateless Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh*, 1992.
18. Indian Citizenship Act, Secs. 5(1)(a), 3(1), and 3(1)(a).
19. Letter from P.M. Sayeed, Minister of State, to Nyodek Yonggam, Member of Parliament, 7 July 1994.
20. Letter from M.M. Jacob, Minister of State, to Laeta Umbrey, Member of Parliament, 23 September 1992.
21. AIR 1996(1) SCC 742.
22. Civil Appeal Nos. 2182/93 with 2181/93.
23. C.I.S. Part I (1948), Order under Sec. 3 of the Foreigners Act, New Delhi, 14 February 1948.
24. Government of India Act, Section 91(1), 1935.
25. *State of Arunachal Pradesh v. Khudiram*

Chakma, Civil Appeal Nos. 2182/93 with 2181/93, 27 April 1993, at 26.

26. NHRC v. State of Arunachal Pradesh, *supra* note 21 at 749.

27. See NHRC, *supra* note 21 at 752.

28. C.I.S. Part II(1956), Order under Sec. 18 of the Citizenship Act of 1955, New Delhi, 7 July 1956.

29. AIR 1980 Raj 98.

30. See also Andhra Pradesh v. Mohd. Khan, AIR 1962 SC 1778; 1963 (2) SCJ 178.

31. NHRC, *supra* note 21, at 750.

32. NHRC, *supra* note 21, at 747.

33. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter UDHR), Article 15, G.A. Res. 217 A (III), 10 December 1948.

34. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (hereinafter ICCPR), Article 24, G.A. Res. 2200 A (XXI), 16 December 1966.

35. Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter CRC), Article 7(1). Adopted by UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989.

36. ICCPR, *supra* note 35, Article 26.

37. Government of Arunachal Pradesh, White Paper on Chakma and Hajong Refugee issue, 4, 1996.

38. *Ibid.*, at 4.

39. *Ibid.*, Preface.

40. ICCPR, *supra* note 35, Article 20(2).

41. NHRC, *supra* note 22, at 10.

42. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter ICESCR), Article 9(1), G.A. Res. 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966.

43. *Ibid.*, Article 9(2).

44. ICCPR, *supra* note 35, Article 7.

45. NHRC, *supra* note 22, at 11.

46. CRC, *supra* note 36, Article 28.

47. ICESCR, *supra* note 43, Article 11(1).

48. Peoples' Rights Organization, *supra* note 18, at 13.

49. See, 'Threat to stop supply line to Arunachal', *Hindustan Times*, 4 October 1994; 'Reports of atrocities on Chakma tribals', *Hindustan Times*, 13 May 1995; 'NHRC moves S.C. over Chakmas', *The Statesman*, 4 November 1995; 'AAPSU firm on eviction', *Eastern Clarion*, 30 January 1996; and *Denial and Discrimination pursued against the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh*, National Centre for the Protection of Human Rights, presented at The National Convention on Human Rights, 3-8 January 1992.

50. NHRC, *supra* note 21, at 752.

# Stateless in South Asia

SUMIT SEN

THE essay explores the application of the doctrine of stateless refugees in international law in the context of forced population displacement of Bihari refugees of Pakistan in Bangladesh. The Partition of India had displaced the Biharis in 1947. With the break-up of Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Biharis were displaced a second time, giving rise to their international status as refugees. However, this status has seldom been recognised in international law.

This paper employs the public international law framework of analyses. It will establish their refugee status by assessing established norms of well-founded fear and persecution for reasons of nationality and political opinion, which led the Biharis to flee from Bangladesh. The creation of Bangladesh began a process of denationalisation of Biharis by Pakistan. In this context, the international law relating to territorial change and the deprivation of nationality of Biharis raises issues of their status as *de facto* stateless refugees.

Finally, the Bihari refugees' right to return to the country of former habitual residence will be analysed, drawing on their right of option exer-

cised in 1971. This follows from Pakistan's obligation to protect the real and effective nationality of Bihari refugees. The genuine link of Biharis with Pakistan provides a legal solution to the protracted refugeehood, giving rise to issues of repatriation, family reunification and integration, in arguing for the role of the UNHCR.

**T**he communal violence after the partition of India in 1947, preceded by the so-called 'great Bihar killing' of 30,000 Muslims in October-November,<sup>1</sup> resulted in a large-scale movement of Muslims into the newly created province of East Pakistan. Consequently, a million refugees migrated into East Bengal in 1947.<sup>2</sup> It was estimated that 95.9 per cent of these refugees came from the eastern Indian states of Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim.<sup>3</sup> Although Pakistan was successful in gaining her independence as a theocratic state, it had a ethnically plural society. From the beginning, the crises of national integration and the assimilation of refugees from India created more complexities than solutions, an 'insider-versus-outsider' syndrome, and the existential problem of lack of acceptance and assimilation of the Bihari refugees in East Pakistan.

The culture of the Bihari refugees contributed to defining the ethnic boundary between them and the majority Bengali residents. Besides, when the West Pakistani feudal elite

began to capture economic and political power in East Pakistan, the Biharis, who shared the linguistic background of the elite, began to covertly identify with them. Their ethnic identity became important in various sectors of the East Pakistani economy, and the Bengali majority found the Biharis in a relatively privileged position in getting official patronage.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Biharis acquired the nationality of Pakistan as a precondition to resettlement, and priority was given to the *muhajirs*<sup>5</sup> by public policy measures, especially in the railways, post and telegraph, armed forces, private industries, trade and commerce.

**T**he arrival of the Biharis and the Pakistan government's efforts at refugee rehabilitation were not initially resented by the local Bengali population. In fact, in the general euphoria of the creation of Pakistan, positive discrimination for the Bihari refugees was welcomed. The Pakistani ruling elite portrayed the Bihari as the *muhajir* so as to make the Bengalis of East Pakistan feel duty-bound to help and accept them as their own people. Between 1947-51, a large number of Hindu landlords, businessmen, professionals and petty officials emigrated to India, and the Bengali Muslims and Biharis grabbed Hindu properties and acquired their positions at work. At this stage the Bengali Mus-

lims did not think of the Urdu speaking Biharis as minorities.<sup>6</sup>

**H**owever, it was a short honeymoon. As early as March 1948, Jinnah announced in Dhaka that 'Urdu and Urdu alone shall be the state language of Pakistan.' The gradual drift of East and West Pakistan between 1952 and 1971 can be traced to the 'collective megalomania of Pakistani elites, motivated by a colonial attitude of plunder and subjugation of East Pakistan' with a victimisation of the lower echelons of Bengali and Biharis. Despite their class and cultural differences, the Biharis in East Pakistan had accepted the West Pakistani ruling elite as their 'sole patrons, guides and protectors.'

In contradistinction, the Pakistani elite often regarded the Bengali Muslims as 'semi Hindus, pro-Indian and disloyal to Pakistan.' This dysfunctional feeling of the West Pakistani political bureaucracy became evident by the second half of the 1960s, when Pakistan began to loose its hold on the political fabric of East Pakistan. By the late 1960s, while some Biharis openly sided with the quasi-military regime of Pakistan, Bengali Muslims demanded independence for their province.

The process of disintegration of Pakistan in 1971 led to two simultaneous major refugee movements. The first was the escape of an estimated 10 million refugees into India in the aftermath of the brutal massacre of the Bengali populace. The second flight consisted of the minority Biharis into refugee camps as a result of the extermination during the liberation fervour.

6. Taj Hashmi, op. cit., 5. In fact, Mujibur Rahman, later the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, is said to have urged Bihari Muslim refugees to emigrate to East Pakistan. See Basant Chatterjee, *Inside Bangladesh Today: An Eyewitness Account*, New Delhi (1973), 85.

1. Taj Hashmi, *The 'Bihari' Minorities in Bangladesh: Victims of Nationalisms*, mimeo (1996).

2. Minority Rights Group, *The Biharis in Bangladesh*, Report 11, 4th ed., (January 1982), 7.

3. E Haque Chowdhury, 'Non-Bengali Refugees in Bangladesh: Patterns, Policies and Consequences', in John Rogge (ed), *Refugees: A Third World Dilemma*, Rowman and Littlefield, New Jersey (1987), 220.

4. Although it has been argued that the Urdu-speaking educated, well-to-do and businessman preferred West Pakistan to East Pakistan as they envisaged the existing socio-economic-political conditions congenial for their future prospects. See Khurshida Begum, *The Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh and International Implications*. Paper presented at the International Workshop on Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy, Sri Lanka (2-4 August 1989), 9.

5. The term *muhajir* literally translates to mean a refugee. In this case, the *muhajir* is the Bihari refugee.

The existence of persecution in the country of origin forms the basis of the application of international refugee law for determining of status. This paper situates the Biharis within the 1951/67 definition of refugee by providing an analysis of well-founded fear and persecution due to reasons of race, political opinion, nationality and membership of a social group. Further, drawing on the denationalisation of Biharis by Pakistan in 1972, it constructs the status of Biharis as *de facto* stateless refugees.

The definition of the term refugee under the 1951/67 Convention applies to any person who: '...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'

**W**hile the convention illustrates the reasons of fear of persecution, the element of well-foundedness of fear in the determination of status looks towards the future, rather than the past. While 'evidence of tangible harm' done to a potential refugee strengthens the case, 'well-founded fear' protects from further persecution. However, in the construction of the refugee status of Biharis, the evidence of the last 25 years needs to be assessed and involves objective and subjective factors of perceived fear, and the actual persecution suffered by the Biharis.

The parliamentary elections of December 1970 exacerbated Bengali nationalism which translated itself throughout East Pakistan as attacks on Bihari establishments, since it was

widely perceived that most Biharis supported the pro-Pakistan Muslim League. The Bengali mobs continued their terror in both Dhaka and Chittagong, as well as in the peripheral districts beyond the control of the Pakistan Army, until Pakistani control was re-established in March-April 1971.

**T**housands of Biharis were brutally killed with the Bengali petty bourgeoisie and working class active in ethnic cleansing. The massacre of Biharis was described by Mascarenhas: 'Thousands of families of unfortunate Muslims, many of them refugees from Bihar... were mercilessly wiped out. Women were raped or had their breasts torn out with specially fashioned knives. Children did not escape the horror: the lucky ones were killed with their parents; but many thousands of others must go through what life remains for them with their eyes gauged out and limbs roughly amputated. More than 20,000 bodies of the non-Bengalis have been found in the main towns as Chittagong, Khulna and Jessore. The real toll, I was told everywhere in East Bengal, may have been as high as 100,000; for thousands of non-Bengalis have vanished without a trace.'<sup>7</sup>

A government document estimated the death toll of the Biharis to be 15,000,<sup>8</sup> although some eyewitness accounts put the figure at 50,000. Other eyewitness<sup>9</sup> reported that violent mobs, led by gun-totting Awami League storm troopers, 'invaded' the Bihari settlements in Raufabad,

7. Anthony Mascarenhas, *The Rape of Bangladesh*. Delhi (1971). These figures are corroborated by another report, which stated 'the brutal massacre of thousands of non-Bengalis ... (where) 20,000 bodies have been found ... in Bengal's main towns but the final count could top 100,000,' *The Sunday Times*, London, 2 May 1971.

8. *East Pakistan Crisis*, White Paper, Government of Pakistan, August 1971.

Halishahar, Dotala, Kalurghat, Hamzabad and Pahartali. The East Bengal Regimental Centre served as the 'principal human abattoir.'

The prejudice of the state against the Bihari minority is further evidenced in the attitude of Bengali military officers. Major Zia-ur-Rahman is stated to have remarked in 1971 that, 'those who speak Urdu (i.e., Biharis) are also our enemies because they support the Pakistani army. We will crush them.'<sup>9</sup>

**S**ince Urdu was the *lingua franca*, the Biharis had tended to associate themselves with West Pakistan. When the West Pakistani landlords and Urdu-speaking capitalists captured economic and political power in East Pakistan, the Biharis shared their political gain. The governmental policy of favouritism and insulation of the Bihari community from the Bengali majority led the Biharis to cast their fate with the West Pakistani political elite. A majority of them had voted for the Muslim League and Jamati-Islami in the elections. Besides, when the Awami League began to grow as an influential political party of the bourgeoisie and middle class, they found their West Pakistan counterparts a hindrance to their prosperity because their limited approach failed to include Bihari class consciousness.

The Bengali political elite in East Pakistan focussed on Urdu as an issue to denounce the repressive attitude of West Pakistan. While it inspired the majority in East Pakistan, it aggravated the alienation of the Biharis which made them lean towards

9. The systematic massacre of the Biharis was complete when on 28 March 1971 Zia-ur-Rahman ordered his troops to shoot the male Bihari prisoners in Chittagong and allowed his troops to outrage the modesty of the female prisoners. See Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood*. London (1986), 118-9, 122.

the West Pakistanis. The Bengalis, initially sympathetic towards the oppressed Biharis, gradually became suspicious of their exclusive attitude and political activities.

It is understood that political opinion, within substantive limitations in human rights, is any opinion on any matter in which the machinery of state, government or policy may be engaged. The political opinion of the Bihari community led it to be pursued by the majority-led government and its entities, particularly where the former addressed the unity of the eastern and western wings of Pakistan. The political agenda of the Bihari community exposed it to the reality of persecution. Although political opinions may or may not be expressed, they might become the attributive features for the determination of refugee status. Since the Biharis had expressed their political will, and as a result suffered repressive measures, their well-founded fear can be clearly evidenced.

In exploring the cause-effect relationship factor, Goodwin-Gill suggests that 'cause and effect are even more indirect where the government of the country of origin cannot be implicated. Refugees, for example, have fled mob violence or the activities of so-called death squads.'<sup>10</sup> Although Goodwin-Gill has categorised the Biharis as refugees escaping organised violence, it needs to be clarified that the provincial government in East Pakistan too should be implicated for organised and orchestrated persecution, eventually leading to the refugeehood of the Biharis. Even after the independence of Bangladesh, the government of Mujibur Rahman failed to stop the violence against the minority community of Biharis.

The Indian Army, as long as it remained in Bangladesh, protected the Biharis in refugee camps.<sup>11</sup> But with its departure, along with the West Pakistani civilian and prisoners of war, the persecution of the Biharis turned into a generalised massacre. Instead of being a safe haven, these camps became the target of attack. Intermittently, water and power were cut, but the Bihari refugees were too terrified to move out in search of food or work.

The visits to some refugee camps in 1973 led to the following observation: 'Perhaps no other class of people in the world today (are) as ruined, economically and socially, as smitten and smashed up, as the community of the former Indian refugees in Bangladesh who are known here by the general term Bihari.... Today in Bangladesh, to be a Bihari is the worst crime.... Thousands have been discharged from service on the ground of "long absence without leave". But their salaries and funds have not yet been paid.... Many persons rejoined duty on the strength of "clearance chits" given by Awami League MPs. But they did not return; even their bodies remained untraced.'

The absence of state security in Bihari camps was evidenced in assaults, looting, rapes, evictions, kidnappings and killings. Most of the attacks were perpetrated by members of the *Mukti Bahini*, with a criminal intent of providing extra-judicial justice. Bearing the label of a 'collaborator' meant imprisonment without trial; it meant regular harassment at the hands of the police, often leading to widespread torture. With food rations reportedly inadequate, and instances of governmental denial to ICRC

to access Bihari camps, the fear of renewed persecution made Biharis desert their homes, which were then taken over by Bengalis. The organised persecution resulted in a near total loss of property of the Bihari refugees, and by the middle of 1972, they were completely domiciled in various camps.

The orchestrated persecution against the Biharis continued because of reasons of race, nationality and membership to a particular social group; because of their ethnic origin and an insistence on retaining their Pakistani nationality. However, persecution was aggravated due to their membership of a particular social group.

While the *travaux préparatoires* of the 1951 Convention did little to explain social group as a category, paragraph 78 of the UNHCR Handbook clarifies: 'Membership of a particular social group may be at the root of persecution because there is no confidence in the group's loyalty to the government or because the political outlook... is... an obstacle to the Government's policies.'

Having a shared group interest tied in with values, background, ethnic and linguistic origin, and 'political outlook', the Biharis were targeted by the governmental forces, by the confiscation of property. In order to make arrangements for the administration and management of such properties, Bangladesh Abandoned Property (Control, Management and Disposal) Order, 1972. The order provided for the acquisition and control of properties of certain persons who are either (a) not present in Bangladesh, or (b) who have ceased to occupy or manage their properties, or (c) who are *alien enemies*. It was concluded that such property would include any property owned by any person who is a citizen of a state which was at war

10. Guy Goodwin-Gill, *The Refugee in International Law* 2nd ed, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1996) 71.

11. Report, Friends of Bangladesh Conciliation Mission, London (27 April-23 May 1972), 7.



with or engaged in military operations against Bangladesh. Since Biharis were citizens of Pakistan, law allowed for the acquisition of the properties of Bihari refugees.

A perusal of the above order clarifies that Pakistani nationals cannot recover or release their properties, since there are no statutory provisions. In addition, the term *alien friends* was employed, where it was stated that Pakistanis are not allowed to recover properties by filing suits under s.83 of the Civil Procedure Code, although there is no bar on alien friends under s.83 to file suits. The procedural law disguised and took away provisions by employing confusing terminology. In essence, alien friends was technically treated as alien enemies, in spite of provisions in law where resident non-citizens were entitled to enjoy the protection of the law and be treated in accordance of the law.

**T**he principle of vested or acquired rights supports the principle that a change of sovereignty has no effect on the private rights of individuals.<sup>12</sup> It appears that the successor state faces restrictions on its powers in relation to private rights of aliens in addition to rules of international law governing the treatment of aliens in a case of succession. The acquired rights principle was qualified by O'Connell, who stated that 'the principle of respect for acquired rights in international law is no more than a principle that change of sovereignty should not touch the interests of individuals more than is necessary.' He further stated that 'the alteration and cancellation of acquired rights by successor states must comply with the minimum standards of international law.' It is now amply evident that Bangladeshi practice of

acquiring the rights of Biharis has fallen well short of accepted international legal norms and procedure.

Pakistan helped perpetrate the persecution of the Biharis under Bangladeshi rule by a denial of their effective nationality. In this context, the presumptions and policy rules against the arbitrary deprivation of nationality merit attention. It is well established in rules of international law that 'no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality,' and if necessary, the deprivation must be prescribed by law.

**H**owever, deprivation of nationality, in particular mass denationalisation, has been declared as inconsistent with the international obligation of states. Others have tried to prove that denationalisation for penal or political reasons is inconsistent with the notion of the human being as a person in law. It has been reinforced that deprivation on grounds of a policy of racial inequality or persecution is contrary to international law and elementary principles of humanity. The act of denationalisation may not *per se* have delictual consequences, but it is probable that it would be a breach of the provisions of the UN Charter concerning equality of peoples and human rights. Further, the deprivation is not entitled to recognition by other international actors, because it disregards the doctrine of effective link, and represents an attempt to avoid the responsibilities of territorial sovereignty and statehood.

The common standards of non-arbitrariness in deprivation of nationality have provided some generalisations, including (i) deprivation of nationality prescribed by law after full legal proceedings involving review and appeal, (ii) deprivation not leading to statelessness, (iii) depriva-

tion acceptable if nationality secured by fraud, or (iv) if the national engages in acts posing serious threats to national security.

Within international legal norms, while post-1971 Pakistan legislated categories of Biharis who would qualify for repatriation, a majority of the Biharis were excluded due to restrictive acceptance practices by Pakistan. When Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation in December 1971, there were more than a million Bihari refugees. Although governmental figures state that 600,000 accepted the citizenship of Bangladesh, there were 539,669 who registered with the ICRC in order to return to their country of nationality. While the ICRC estimated that 60 per cent wished to go to Pakistan, Biharis themselves stated that 95 per cent wanted to go to Pakistan and 5 per cent to India. Since a majority had suffered widespread persecution or still perceived considerable threat, they had all chosen to repatriate out of Bangladesh, and essentially to Pakistan.

**T**he first political step in formulating categories of non-Bengalis to be accepted in Pakistan began with the recognition of Bangladesh as an independent state. This was primarily because President Bhutto of Pakistan needed to negotiate the return of 93,000 POWs held captive in Bangladesh. However, he was equally anxious to see that the one million Biharis did not move to Pakistan. Although Bhutto spoke against the proposed Bangladeshi war crimes trial of Pakistanis, he was unwilling to admit any sizeable number of Biharis refugees into Pakistan.

Pakistan agreed by the New Delhi Agreement of 28 August 1973 to transfer a substantial number of 'non-Bengalis' in Bangladesh who had opted for repatriation to Pakistan,

12. See O'Connell, *International Law*, (2nd ed), (1970) 377-81, 388-9; *State Succession*, (2nd ed), ch. 6 and 10.

in exchange for Bengalis in Pakistan and the return of POWs. She engaged ICRC as the route for all applications for repatriation from Biharis to the Government of Pakistan. However, ICRC made it clear that 'registration with the ICRC does not give a right to repatriation. The final acceptance... lies with (the) Pakistan and Bangladesh governments.' Pakistan began issuing clearances in favour of those 'non-Bengalis' who were either (i) domiciled in former West Pakistan, (ii) were employees of the central government and their families or (iii) were members of divided families, irrespective of their original domicile.

**P**akistan reiterated that those covered under the first three categories would be received by her without any limit as to members. In respect of persons whose applications had been rejected, Pakistan agreed, upon request, to provide reasons why any particular case was rejected. Any aggrieved applicant could, at any time, seek a review of his application provided he was able to supply new facts to support his contention that he qualified in one of the three categories. The claims of such persons would not be time bound. In the event of a review, it was decided that Pakistan and Bangladesh would resolve it by mutual consultation.

However, in practice, denationalisation through non-adherence under the established categories was effected, since a majority remain to be repatriated. The process of review of rejected applicants and the definitions of the central government employees and divided families merit a fresh legal assessment. First, all railway employees should have been included within the first category, since the decision to provincialise the railways was essentially administrative. The

service tenure and conditions of these employees remained the same. To not accept railway employees within central government staff can be stated to be a violation of her own categorisation by Pakistan.

Second, it can be argued that the category of divided family applied by Pakistan was unilaterally determined and was more restrictive than that identified by ICRC in their letter requesting options regarding repatriation. It is estimated that 75 per cent of Bihari families stand divided because of the restrictive definition of divided families, since grandparents, parents, unmarried siblings were not considered part of the same family for the issuance of clearance documents. Bangladesh has asserted the need for the acceptance of a broader and Islamic definition of the family, since the present definition is narrow and restrictive, based on the western concept of the family. This argument upholds family reunification as one of the fundamental provisions of refugee law in any effective resolution procedure.

**T**hird, it had been agreed between Pakistan and Bangladesh that the antecedents of the person who returned to Pakistan as a hardship case would be examined. Were it to be established that s/he fell within the other two categories, then additional hardship cases would be included. At the outset, the definitional and numeric limits of the hardship cases have caused a legal anomaly, since it needs to be explained why Pakistan limited the number to 25,000. In reality, the hardship cases had essentially included Biharis who had been within the other two categories, and certainly not war victims, orphans or disabled persons. Over the years, Pakistan has failed to give a breakdown of the number of persons listed under the categories,

and the vacancies in the hardship category.

Therefore, the resort to denationalisation of Biharis by Pakistan is an abuse of human rights under international law, constituting an attempt to throw off the duty of admission and thereby casting an illegal burden on the state of residence.

**I**t needs to be firmly established that the Biharis renounced their homes in 1947 in order to make East Pakistan their country of nationality and residence. Bangladesh was not the country they had migrated to or opted for. Before the birth of Bangladesh, they stood for the integrity of Pakistan, were Pakistani nationals, and till date have not renounced their Pakistani nationality.

The leanings of political parties and mileage gained from inter-ethnic riots in Pakistan has stunted the repatriation process in the two-and-a-half decades. With every political upsurge and turmoil, there has been a perceptible change in state policy, leaving the Bihari refugees to orbit in statelessness and uncertainty. Sharif, who had so magnanimously offered to settle them in Punjab, is now the country's Prime Minister. Though he has recently held talks with Bangladesh MP Hasina relating to the return, a GOP policy paper on the issue is yet to emerge.

The repatriation figures over the last 25 years correspond to the law of diminishing returns. Till date, an estimated 178,069 Bihari refugees have returned to their country of former habitual residence. While practice has left a majority waiting to return home, Pakistan certainly needs much more to assure the Bihari refugees and the international community of the resolution of this protracted crisis. The foreign secretary is recently reported to have stated, 'both Bangladesh and

Pakistan have recognised this repatriation as a *humanitarian* issue and agreed to solve it expeditiously.... I don't want to set a time limit.'<sup>13</sup> It needs to be reaffirmed that by her illusive state practice, Pakistan is violating the norms of human dignity and acceptable international behaviour, in spite of her membership to the executive committee of the UNHCR.

The right to return of Bihari refugees needs assessment within the 'primary' rule of international law which forbids the abusive exercise of rights of control over movement of people, rights which would be violated if certain limits are exceeded in the course of the exercise, or if they are exercised with the intention of harming others. The practice of Pakistan has harmed the Bihari community where the inability of refugees to return home has been accentuated by the arbitrary deprivation of their nationality. In this regard, a 'view is widely held... that a State may not unilaterally shirk its duty of admission by depriving its national of his nationality... (and)... this duty remains in force, at least in so far as the individual concerned did not acquire another nationality.' The Bihari refugees have been denied nationality by the unilateral shirking of Pakistan in her duty to grant citizenship to her subjects who had been persecuted in her territory.

In summary, the right to return is guaranteed without restrictions to all nationals, including the *de facto* stateless refugees. After the independence of Bangladesh, since most Bihari refugees have not acquired another nationality, it may be concluded that Pakistan has deprived her *de jure* nationals their right to return in international law, a right which is regarded as *ex debito justitiae*.

13. Najmuddin Sheikh, Foreign Secretary, GOP. Author emphasis. See 'Refugees to Return', *The Asian Age*, London, 19 August 1996.

# Providing refuge

ARUNDHATI GHOSE

RESPONSES to 'repatriation challenges' are neither easy to identify nor implement. However, permit me to offer some of our views with the hope that our comments could contribute to, at least, a better understanding of the issues involved.

Repatriation challenges, in our view, is a subject which should be examined in the context of the nature of movements which are currently taking place in the world. In general, it appears to us that there are mainly three different types of movements – mass exoduses due to civil war situations, which mostly occur in developing countries; individuals or groups seeking asylum, predominantly in developed countries; and the phenomenon of illegaleconomic migrants, common to both developing and developed countries. Since these movements differ from each other as to their cause and nature, the 'solutions' evolved should be tailored to meet the specific characteristics of each of these movements.

In developing countries, confronted with mass exoduses due to civil war like situations in their neighbourhood, the historical openness to the arrival of refugees appears to be waning and emphasis has necessarily moved to repatriation. Though more and more refugees are returning home, this movement is often taking place to countries of origin which are still volatile and unstable. The challenge in such situations is therefore to ensure that refugees are given safety and shelter, repatriation is truly voluntary and that return is to conditions of safety and dignity. However, since the receiving countries are usually

\* Based on a statement to the UN at the 48th Session of the UNHCR Excom, Geneva, 13 October 1997.

among the poorest in the world, such a solution would depend on the extent to which the international community can assist host developing countries through financial support and other forms of burden sharing and the degree to which the problems in countries of origin can be addressed.

**A**t present, neither the duty to receive refugees nor the real costs associated with their arrival are fairly apportioned across the world. Distribution of state responsibility towards refugees is based on accidents of geography and the relative ability of states to control their borders. Any assistance received from other countries or UNHCR is seen as a matter of charity and the entire system survives tenuously on vague promises of cooperation accompanied by undependable funding. A large number of developing countries engaged in a desperate struggle to provide their own citizens with the basic necessities of life today find themselves crippled and highly frustrated by the enormous burden that mass exoduses impose on them. It may be pointed out that the 1951 Convention to which I will refer later neither anticipates nor provides answers to the problems of frontline receiving states confronted with such mass exoduses.

Traditionally, developing countries have always been willing hosts. They have never adopted legalistic approaches or restrictive definitions of refugees. All persons who flee their homelands in distress have invariably been provided refuge, irrespective of the reasons for their flight. However, it is but natural that the continued neglect of the impact large refugee populations have on developing countries weakens their willingness to provide sanctuary. 'Genuine' solidarity and burden sharing is therefore the main response needed to meet the challenge

of ensuring effective protection to refugees and the voluntariness of repatriation in developing countries.

At the same time, concerted action is required to address the problems in the countries of origin to ensure that repatriation takes place under conditions of dignity and safety. This would entail a coordinated approach to dealing with the unsettled conditions in the country of origin through assistance to returnees and the country itself so as to enable it absorb the return. Keeping in mind the fact that humanitarian assistance can only provide temporary relief, these efforts should focus on strengthening national capacities. Programmes for the return and reintegration of refugees could attempt a seamless transition by dovetailing developmental approaches into the relief stage itself and providing for a relief-development continuum through eventual hand-over to national agencies and appropriate agencies like the UNDP.

**T**he second category of movements, in our view, could be said to relate to individuals or groups seeking political asylum from countries where they fear persecution for their beliefs, political persuasion, and so on. Such flows, if indeed they can be characterized as such, are usually to developed countries. Unfortunately, here we find that the very institution of asylum has come under threat as political refugees are treated as potential illegal economic migrants and received with some paranoia. In our view, it is to this category of refugees that the 1951 Convention applies.

It would appear that signatories to the Refugee Convention are derogating from its provisions, introducing new concepts such as 'temporary protection' and even questioning the fundamental principle of 'non refoulement'. The persons in this category are

miniscule compared to those of the first category where repatriation has been widely accepted as the best solution. Despite this, political refugees in the second category find themselves faced with restrictive practices such as border closures, interdiction at sea, expulsions and premature return to an insecure environment imposed by countries who have the economic ability and, indeed, the duty to give them both asylum and protection. We have no doubt that the social reaction to economic migrants, legal and illegal, has impacted adversely on the refugee regime in these countries.

**B**urden sharing does not mean that developed countries can meet their obligations only by assisting developing countries in hosting large refugee populations. It also implies that developed countries have to accept their responsibilities under international refugee and humanitarian law and should desist from unilateral restrictive practices. Refugee protection involves the human rights of the refugees concerned and discriminatory treatment and denial of asylum to these political refugees, in our view, constitutes a violation of human rights. There is a need for developed countries, which have not yet done so, to accept the concept of multi-culturalism and pluralism so that all persons living in their territories are guaranteed basic human rights.

Finally, we come to the category of economic migrants who sometimes seek illegal channels of entry. As mentioned earlier, this phenomenon has led to genuine political refugees being refused asylum in developed countries. However, it is a fact that such flows take place and may be a cause of concern; what is less well known is that such flows also take place, perhaps in greater numbers, to developing countries such as my own and others like South Africa. Neither the parameters

nor dimensions of this complex problem are known and till more detailed information is available, solutions may not be possible to identify.

We are therefore of the view that UNHCR as the principal UN agency responsible for refugees, and as an institution which has tremendous experience in handling composite flows, can be a catalyst in the process of studying these questions, identifying options and evolving solutions. We would like to see UNHCR take the lead and initiate comprehensive studies in this regard, bringing together agencies such as the International Organisation for Migration, ILO, and so on.

**W**e view UNHCR's main task as relating to the first category referred to above where, indeed, the office is primarily occupied. We are not in favour of the UNHCR being pushed into a 'good offices' or 'passive monitoring' role with regard to the return of rejected asylum seekers from developed countries. Any role assumed by UNHCR in such matters should be global in approach and in the nature of a 'think-tank'. Global problems require global solutions. Partial and regional solutions that serve the interests of a few will only erode the credibility of the entire system.

May I in this regard also refer to the recent decision of the European Union which through the Treaty of Amsterdam seeks to restrict access to asylum to its citizens on grounds that procedures are being misused by elements who pose a threat to the security of some of its member states. In our view, unilateral solutions such as these do not constitute the right way forward.

Problems like terrorism should be addressed in a collective manner taking into account the interests of all states equally and the international

character of the problem. It is in the interest of all countries that persons seeking refuge do not forment violence against their countries of origin and that the purpose of refugee law remains providing humanitarian refuge to those fleeing 'persecution', not protection to persons fleeing 'prosecution'.

**R**emedial measures must be universal. An open, transparent and multilateral process is the best means of ensuring the right balance between the minimum protection refugees must enjoy and the legitimate security concerns of states.

Turning to India's own approach to the issue of refugees, while we do not as yet have a comprehensive refugee law (existing regulations being related to resettlement and rehabilitation of refugees who came to India after Partition and in 1971 after the crisis in Bangladesh), certain markers have been laid down by various decisions of our courts, which are based on the principle of the right to life and liberty to all persons residing within our borders. The courts have also recognized in specific cases the role of the UNHCR as an independent neutral body when dealing with complex political issues relating to refugees.

As is known, we have not signed the 1951 Convention. Let me use this opportunity to explain why. The 1951 Convention was adopted in the specific context of conditions in Europe during the period immediately after the Second World War. International refugee law is currently in a state of flux and it is evident that many of the provisions of this convention, particularly those which provide for individualized status determination and social security, have little relevance to the circumstances of developing countries who today are mainly confronted with mass and mixed inflows.

Moreover, signing the convention is unlikely to improve in any practical manner the actual protection which has always been enjoyed and continues to be enjoyed by refugees in India.

We therefore believe that the time has come for a fundamental reformulation of international refugee law to take into account present-day realities. We stand ready and willing to join any international discussions in this regard. We are aware that fears have been expressed that any such move could lead to a downward spiral in protection for refugees and that the current mood in the more powerful countries of the world is not in favour of refugees. However, it has to be recognised that refugees and mass movements are first and foremost a 'developing country' problem and that the biggest 'donors' are in reality developing countries who put at risk their fragile environment, economy and society to provide refuge to millions. An international system which does not address their concerns adequately cannot be sustained in the long run.

**I** would like to conclude with a brief reference to the decision adopted by the Excom on expanding the role of NGOs in the activities of the standing committee. NGOs have a very important role to play on refugee issues and can bring to the meetings of the Excom the valuable experience they have acquired through operations at the grassroot level. We welcome this decision and believe it marks a major step forward. The value addition NGOs provide should be based on their grassroots experience and the secretariat should ensure that NGOs who participate are those who have actual experience of refugee issues. Meetings of the UNHCR Excom are at present conducted in a highly professional manner and they should continue to remain so.

# Books

**CHARRED LULLABIES: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence** by E. Valentine Daniel.  
Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996.

**LEVELING CROWDS: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia** by Stanley J. Tambiah. Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1997.

SHOULD memories of violence be invoked or revived? There are apparently well-argued, rational, intellectual ostrich acts that decry time travel to a violent past. On the other hand, there are poignant, yet no less cerebral arguments trying to understand what violence, past and present, does to human beings. In this search for understanding, the past and the present merge. For instance, accounts of the arrest of Adolf Eichmann and his subsequent cross-examination for 275 hours by Captain Avner Less, himself a Jew, as a prelude to the former's trial held in Jerusalem in April 1961, seem to bring out the tormented revulsion, horror, and strangely, the need to go back to the past in order to reclaim the future for the next generation.

Captain Less had serious reservations about the trial, especially since it was to be held in Israel. For 'no Jew anywhere in the world could remain indifferent to this event. Was there a home anywhere in Israel that had no victims to mourn?' Though Less dreaded the prospect of opening wounds that had 'scarcely begun to heal,' his hesitation was marked by searing doubts: 'But then, did we have the right to forget? Wouldn't we be endangering our children's future if we turned our backs on the past?' This is the terrible responsibility of the present, and this deliberate choice of Less indicates the onus on the present to weld together the past and the future.

This is the responsibility that E. Valentine Daniel owns up. The deeply moving opening passage in *Charred Lullabies* is actually a lament: 'Many have died.... Tellipalai, Nilaveli, Manipay, Boosa... mere place-names of another time – have been transformed into names of places with blood and mortal residue.

Kelani Ganga and Kelu Ganga, Sri Lankan rivers of exquisite beauty, for a shudderingly brief period in 1989, were clogged with bodies and foamed with blood.... How to give an account of these events without giving in to a desire to shock? And ... what does it mean to give such an account?'

However, as a sensitive academic, he does not allow himself to slip into the prurience of violence; he acknowledges the danger of sliding into a pornography of violence. Running through the book is an awareness of his status as an expatriate half-Sinhalese, half-Tamil US citizen, who is an anthropologist to boot. Daniel's self-critical awareness of his own unique and privileged status as a recorder and observer – free to travel anywhere, distanced from Sri Lanka by thousands of miles when not investigating the Sri Lankan violence and living a life of prosperity supposedly free from any threat to his life – overlies his narrative and theoretical interpretations. This awareness underpins his conviction that a theoretical straitjacket cannot encompass the magnitude of human suffering; he positions his theoretical frame (derived mostly from Charles S. Peirce) against the personal narratives of people facing death, pain, suffering, loss, and the trauma of homelessness.

The informants Daniel uses entrust their memories to him, so that he can transform himself into their cumulative voice, in the hope that their pain will be understood in a world that can still presumably differentiate between the right and the wrong, and the good and the evil, where the values of the sanctity of life and human dignity are still recognised as values integral to human existence. The sense of individual moral responsibility that permeates the book holds the reader captive and infects him/her with the author's urgency. One should not forget, because it is one's moral duty not to forget, lest the madness of violence should suddenly seize a society, while the pursuit of the humdrum everyday paralyses the conscience.

The socio-political context of the Third World makes such an urgency doubly significant, for there is a certain imperviousness to such moral compulsions.

Daniel reminds us that remembrance, mourning, reaffirmation of universal principles, is a responsibility we have to bear. They are the ways to forgiveness, reconciliation and transcendence of pain and loss. When the responsibility for bearing the memories grows weaker, when whole communities are encouraged to bury the past, they stop listening as well.

By way of preparing the ground for his explorations of the raw world of ethnic violence, Daniel, at the beginning of his exposition, concedes that nothing in a cultural matrix is given, not even culture itself. Ethnic identities like gender, race, culture and nation are constructions, often invisible. The contours of these constructions have deep roots in history and are concealed well in the mind of communities, inaccessible to even careful deconstruction. Such constructions, calibrated with different levels of resilience, offer resistance to any questioning of deep-seated convictions. Thus, according to Daniel, a flat rendition of the inter-ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka on the differences in language, religion and race – Tamil and Sinhala, Hindu and Buddhist, Tamilian and Sinhalese – misses the nuanced problem of ethnicity. In such reductionist representation of ethnicity 'one senses the mighty hand of nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship... of the classification of languages on the political and demographic landscape' (p. 15). The victory of the European historical consciousness over the traditional historical consciousness has tragic implications.

This disjunction between history as the 'way of being' in the world, fundamental to the traditional historical consciousness, and history as a 'way of seeing', a concept embedded in the European historical consciousness which claims to have transcended 'being', is the basis of a shift in perception of identities, 'one's own and the Other's'. The way of being in the world in the traditional historical sense combined a sense of the past and heritage. The cultural differences were simply other ways of being. The Sinhala Buddhists and their ancient *vamsa* literary tradition of chronicles as a heritage could be counterpoised against the epic and bardic traditions of the Tamils, but 'these groups did not form closed circles as they have today.' The prime agents responsible for the epistemic shift in historical perceptions from a 'way of being' to a 'way of seeing' were the introduction of modern history in the 19th century and the concept of the nation state, both imports from the West. Daniel's meditations on the nature of history sidesteps the temptation of enumerating causes of ethnic violence and probes the conditions that make such violence possible, thereby changing the frame-

work of conventional debates on the subject. Future studies in the area will have to contend with this shift in the parameters of analysis.

Daniel takes a kaleidoscopic view of the history of the estate Tamils and the Jaffna Tamils, their feelings of difference, even while sharing a common language, and the cataclysmic violence that broke out in 1983-84, and again in 1989, to bring about a sea-change in the attitudes of the younger generation. The differentiated responses of the well-settled, first generation expatriates in the United Kingdom, and to a lesser degree of the second generation towards the third generation Tamil refugees, mainly estate Tamils, reveals tensions among the Tamil Hindus themselves. Some of the well-settled first and second generation Tamils even went for raising funds for the LTTE, and believed that the estate Tamils should fight for their rights instead of becoming burdens on the international community.

In the face of such tepid support, often verging on indifference, strange links have been forged between the black community and the Tamil refugees internationally, links that sustain the refugees and politicise them. But international help was not easy to mobilise, for international opinion was weighted against terrorism and therefore against the LTTE, as exemplified by the Indian Army's action to support the Sri Lankan state against the Tigers. The violent acts of the Indian Army against the Tamil civilians added to the terror of the people, compelling many to take the decision of fleeing from violence.

And what of the refugees? Perhaps the best answer is given by Shoba, a ten-year old girl sent off on her own to Canada on a false passport by her parents. She had witnessed the murder of her best friend and an old woman by the Indian soldiers. Replying to a query as to what she would do in Canada, she says: 'Keep away from anyone who talks about Eelam or Sri Lanka or motherland' (p. 185). The little girl talks of a world that has collapsed into a state of terror; the only reference points for her are labels that come with identities and causes. And what strikes the reader is the perception of how utterly comprehensive is her rejection of precisely the labels which are acceptable in her world.

Stanley J. Tambiah, in his book *Leveling Crowds*, also eloquently addresses the issue of the construction of modern historiography and the modern nation state that configure different peoples into identities based on language, religion, geographical territory, race. A global context of ethnic violence, Tambiah states, 'is a major reality of our time.' He provides a

register of such conflicts – Jews and the Christians in the Christian world, Jews and the other minorities on the one hand and Great Russians on the other, Anglophones and Francophones in Canada, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Walloons and Flemings in Belgium, Chinese and Malays in Malaysia, Greeks and Turks in Cyprus, Turks and Kurds in Eastern Turkey, the recent upheavals between the Sinhala and Tamil populations in Sri Lanka, the Sikhs and the Hindus as well as the Muslims and the Hindus in India, Chakmas and Muslims in Bangladesh, the PLO and Israel – and so on. Conflicts over race, religion, language, territory keep multiplying and they are never resolved. Only ominously for the world, new ones are added to the list.

Tambiah also addresses the problems of mass displacements, refugee camps and large-scale expulsions of people, especially in three countries of South Asia: Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. In Sri Lanka, as early as 1915, the Sinhala Buddhist-Muslim tensions based on religious differences had erupted into violence; the different demands of language, territory, and the sharpening of the Tamilian and Sinhalese ethnic identities had resulted in confrontations between the two communities in 1956, and then again in the 1980s. In India, we saw the Hindu-Sikh riots in 1984, the tensions between the Muslims and the Hindus in Kashmir, and with the rise of Hindu nationalism, the riots in Bombay over the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992-3. In Pakistan, especially in Karachi since 1985, bloodshed over differences between the Mohajir on the one hand, and the Pathans and the Sindhis on the other have occurred frequently.

These confrontations are inseparably interwoven into the nation-building process in South Asia, sometimes helping it, more often impeding it by inducing greater distrust between the different communities. Tambiah locates the transformation of the democratic processes in South Asia, and the mutating manner in which the process fits into the exigencies of power politics of different parties searching for social bases, spheres of influence, and legitimacy. The careful orchestration of domestic violence by political parties constantly stoke and dampen passions according to the exigencies of politics.

Tambiah is quick to point out the crowd content of such orchestrated violence, a violence that is so ritualized and routinized that its effects on the self/individual is often invisible. Ritualisation and routinisation of violence explains how, once the madness of the riots pass, they can return to the normal everyday

co-existence without experiencing any moral quandary. But increasingly, such riots are affecting the victims as well as the aggressors, possibly because there is no clear demarcation between the two categories. A made-to-order history, using as its kernel points of confrontation in teleological historical time, has contributed to the sharpening of differences, in its turn the basis of different identities.

The history of the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 serves as an illustration of just such a process. An easy return to normalcy is therefore no longer that easy. Greater distrust, different demands of different communities, have taken its toll on the resilience and resistance of communities. Not even the 'most radical' have inspected the huge baggage-train of history: only occasionally and selectively, yet another skeleton in the closet is brought out into the open to serve the purpose of violence. When the violence subsides and the skeleton is thrust back into the dark cupboard, 'normalcy' is restored. Yet, Tambiah observes, this return to 'normalcy' and moral health of communities has not been given attention by either the state or non-governmental agencies. End of riots meant an end of the concern of the state and other non-state organisations – a shortsightedness for which the communities pay again and again.

Violence can be triggered by religious festivals, ironically the markers of mutual harmony in times of peaceful coexistence. Rumours, taking advantage of the communication networks, supply the needed justifications for violence and set supposedly retaliatory acts into motion. Occasionally even legitimate demands, backed by age-old traditions, can spark off violence and killing. Behind the butchery, rape and loot, are not just the lumpen criminals and the unscrupulous politicians as the middle-classes fondly imagine, but also the colluding classes of respectable people whose sympathies lie with the aspirations of different ethnic demands, formalised, for instance, in the ideology of the Hindu Rashtra in India or the Eelam in Sri Lanka. The separation of such elements from the overtly criminal action of the crowds is impossible, just as we cannot separate the partiality, inefficiency or silence of a state's law-enforcing institutions when small triggering incidents escalate into blood-baths.

At what point do legitimate demands shade into ethnic conflict, to what extent can the silent support of the majority be witness to unspeakable atrocities on the minorities, what limits are set upon the self-assertion of minorities by the majority communities? The concepts of secularism and of nation-building, appear like



masks to further this or that interest, group, party, community, nation. In an extreme case of the champion of national interests in recent times, Pol Pot, the founder of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, responsible for the deaths of more than a million people, can insist that his conscience is clear as his timely political actions saved Cambodia from being taken over by the Vietnamese (*The Statesman*, 24.10.97). One comes back to individual moral responsibility and to memories that remind us of the universal principles that rebel in the face of senseless death and the desecration of human dignity. The numbing that takes place through a four-line newspaper report on death and disaster on gigantic scales dissuades one from connecting atrocities committed by human beings on other human beings. It hides the debris of dead bodies and ravaged lives behind the news lines.

Both the books, dealing with different aspects of collective violence, sensitise the reader to a range of issues, especially the one of acknowledging responsibility for the Other, without which social harmony and mutual understanding are lost. Daniel's personalised reading of the Sri Lankan violence during the 1980s can stand for any individual's bewilderment and horror when he/she has witnessed senseless violence, and is therefore worth quoting: 'These chapters may not march toward a single point, but they register movement... of time itself... from the relative confidence in the intellect's and this intellectual's capacity to make sense of the events before, during, and since the summer of 1983 to a far less gallant stance of hoping to leave behind a testament to the memory of the fallen, the unfallen, and the fall itself. One may never understand, but one must never forget' (p.7).

**Anindita Mukhopadhyay**

**THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE: Stories From the Partition of India** by Urvashi Butalia. Penguin, Delhi, (forthcoming) 1998.

A LITTLE over a decade ago, cultural critic Edward Said in collaboration with photographer Jean Mohr produced a memorable book. After *The Last Sky* is about Palestinian lives, in exile, in Palestine and outside. As refugees; they are exemplars, their existential situation best captured in these lines by poet Mahmoud Darwish: 'Where should we go after the last frontiers, where should the birds fly after the last sky?' There is another phrase in the book which is impossible to forget! 'We are the victims of a... by the victims of a holocaust.'

It is not that Palestinians and the Palestine question have not been written about. If anything, the reverse. The holy land and its people have, after all, been painful witness to one of the biggest and continuing tragedies of this century. Yet, the Said-Mohr book stands out. For once the images captured, in words and photographs, are not those of war, of guns and terror, bombs and bodies. It is how Palestinians, homeless and without a homeland, reconstruct themselves in their everyday lives—in small acts of living and loving, joy, celebration and pain, in loss and remembering. The mood is not one of anger or recrimination. No resignation. A quiet determination to continue. A far cry from the image of a Leila Khaled or an Arafat with gun.

For us, closer home, is the Partition. For some the rupturing of a homeland, for others the discovery of one: Millions moved across imaginary and real borders. Exiled from home and hearth, many died. It set into motion a process of memory—anger at what had been done to them, tinged with a wistful regret for what had been left behind—*watan*. The official documents and statistics, at best, partially capture the trauma of those fateful years, a trauma which still continues.

While some of this 'drama' was captured in the literature of the period, for years a pall of silence hung over the 'event'. 'What had to happen, happened. The deed was done, Partition was an accomplished fact. Why rake up old ghosts, painful memories? The horrors of the past must be put behind us. We must look ahead.' True. But, surely not by forgetting.

The last decade has witnessed an unusual resurgence of interest in those years. And this time around we have not just anthologies of poems and short stories, old and new. Or films from Tamas and Mammo to *Train to Pakistan*. We have a new kind of history. Archival material and political commentary combine with new oral testimony—this time not from those who orchestrated the event, the leaders, but those who suffered, the hitherto invisible.

From the Alok Bhalla three volume anthology of *Writings on Partition* to the recent book by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Borders and Boundaries'; from the historical excavations by Gyanendra Pandey to the ongoing Oxfam project under the directorship of Dilip Simeon—the new literature draws upon a variety of methods and sources. What marks out this new literature is the shift in focus from macro analysis, the preoccupation with who was responsible for Partition, to the subjectivity of individual actors.

The focus on women is marked. Not just because they, more than others, lived the horror—of abduction,

rape, torture, forced marriage, killing—but also because it was on their bodies that the newly constituted nation states reinscribed their ideologies, their understanding of culture and morality. It is they who live this even today. And the children. Or the scheduled castes—neither Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim. What happened to them?

Urvashi Butalia is no unfamiliar name, not just to those who follow feminist debates or read *Kali for Women* books, but also those interested in the underbelly of the Partition. Her story of Rana Mama, an uncle who converted and stayed behind in the ancestral house in Lahore has been widely reproduced. Not so the account by mother, Subhadra, who not only had to look after younger siblings, but grieve for the loss of an ailing mother, 'forced' to live out her final years with a son who had converted, in a land that was no longer hers. Or the poignant reunion with a younger brother after 40 years, one whom she had blamed for staying back to grab the property, who notwithstanding conversion, marriage and family, laments that he is a stranger in his own house, accused by his son of being a Hindu spy.

One can add to the wealth of stories. Of Sikhs who killed their own womenfolk so that they would not be polluted. Of women, abducted, forcibly married, then reconciled and even happy, only to be torn away from their new families because abducted women had to be returned. National honour, after all, was at stake. Or the children. Forced to witness depredations and horror, at times inflicting the same on others. Or the ones born out of these strange alliances. Who were they—Hindu or Muslim? Who were they to live with once their mother's were repatriated? Were they to be wards of the state?

The material on the scheduled castes highlights an interesting facet of conflict situations. Being neither Hindu nor Muslim, they felt safe from both. Not just from attack but also to quietly loot, to participate in mayhem from both sides. Unlike the Sikhs who briefly floated the idea of Khalistan, the untouchables in Pakistan rapidly converted to Christianity, burying finally their Hindu past.

There is much that the reader learns from *The Other Side of Partition*. Not just the heart-rending tales that form the staple fare of such cataclysmic happenings. The stories of bestiality and courage, of human weakness and strength—none of which are unique to any one group or community. Or the fact that victim and oppressor seem to merge in varying shades of grey. What really comes across is the conspiracy of silence.

Things happened, were done. Let us not talk about them.

It is not that there are no arguments for silence. Memories, when politically activated, can play havoc. Here at home, with our record of engaging in communal mayhem, maybe these events are best left buried so that shattered lives can be rebuilt. But, do we ever, can we ever forget? Do not these events live on, constantly reworked in the lives and recountings of those who suffered? In the *paths* organised in various gurdwaras, in the *shraadh* ceremonies to the departed. And is not to forget to repeat?

Such exercises, whatever their motive, demand a high order of methodological skill and ethics from those who take on the task of recording and recounting. It is much too easy to slip into maudlin sentimentality, of passing easy judgements, categorising past events and personalities within constructs of the present. That is bad history.

Urvashi Butalia's explorations of the methodological quandries may not satisfy the professional theorist. Oral history, testimony, memory has necessarily to be painstakingly cross-checked with more tangible evidence—documents, letters, diaries, police records—some of which she too draws upon. But, as she reminds us, she is no professional historian providing a new reading of those years. What we essentially have is a rendering that merges the personal with the political.

Not having experienced the Partition through either family or self and claiming no expertise on either the period or about the intricacies of historical methods, this reviewer can only testify to being moved, to being forced to rethink presuppositions, to being struck by candour and honesty. If that is what Urvashi Butalia set out to achieve, she has succeeded.

Harsh Sethi

#### **DIVIDE AND FALL? Bosnia in the Annals of Partition** by Radha Kumar. Verso, London, 1997.

I could make no intuitive sense of Yugoslav 'ethnic cleansing'. Impulsive cruelty I can understand, but not cruelty that is calculated and systematic. I could not imagine what those people had in mind.

F.G. Bailey

*The Civility of Indifference*, 1996.

IT is not just Fred Bailey who was perplexed by the quality of horror epitomised by Bosnia. All of us remember being sickened by the image

brought into our homes by satellite TV. Even the subcontinent, freshly sensitised to the horrors of Partition in the golden jubilee year of Independence, found it difficult to stomach the depredations that our species can perpetrate on fellow humans. Bosnia, Rwanda, Palestine and Ireland match our own dark record as low points of the final years of the millennium.

Why different ethnicities find it difficult to co-exist peacefully remains an unsolved (some say insoluble) question. Ever so often territorial division has been floated as, at least, a partial resolution to the problem of living together, notwithstanding difference. Radha Kumar's elegant monograph, arguably the first-ever by an Indian on Bosnia, attempts to unravel the complexities of partition as a solution to ethnic conflict.

'Originally a colonial formula, partition assumed two distinct forms after the Second World War: ethnic partition, which was accepted as a compromise formula for de-colonization, and ideological partition, which was primarily a means of distinguishing Cold War spheres of influence. Though ideological partition grew in importance during the Cold War and ethnic partition suffered a loss of legitimacy, it has gained a new lease of life chiefly in the wake of the 1995 Dayton Agreement for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Its reappearance in a post-colonial and post-Cold War era is especially curious, given that the disintegration of the Cold War has delegitimised ideological partitions (such as Germany and Korea). Indeed, in the present times the formula is essentially anachronistic.'

Territorial ethnic separations were earlier rooted in colonial policies of divide and rule, the understanding being that 'primordial differences' work against the secular tendencies of integration. In any case 'ruling' becomes easier if subject populations distrust each other and accept the overlordship of the colonial power as the legitimate mediator. However, as maintaining colonial structures became more difficult, the policy shifted to one of divide and quit, partly as a way of avoiding future civil wars, but possibly as much as a way of retaining post-colonial influence.

In our subcontinent this policy was partly successful. Notwithstanding the eventual breaking away of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), or the votaries of an Akhand Bharat, few seriously question the 'right to exist' of the newly created nation states. Nevertheless, distanced policy-makers have rarely appreciated the different projects of the divide and quitters from the divide and rulers. In the case of erstwhile Yugoslavia, which existed in an uneasy tension during the long

years of communist rule, the divide and rulers (Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic, Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman) demonstrated preoccupations quite different from the divide and quitters (NATO or the UN).

Such situations get even more complicated when territory and ethnos do not sit easily with each other, i.e., partitions leave behind ethnically mixed populations. This, particularly in situations of enraged ethnicities, is likely to either contribute to situations of ethnic cleansing or beleaguered and terrified minorities. Be it the Serbs, Croats or Muslims in Bosnia, the Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, to a smaller degree Muslims in India or the Pandits in Kashmir – history is replete with examples of failed partitions.

What then are we to do? Should outsiders, be they erstwhile colonial rulers or current hegemony, just wipe their hands off the mess that they are partly responsible for creating. Just appealing to historical processes and blunders do little to help us practically engage with these explosive situations. Equally, stationing armed forces as a deterrent to violence is hardly a stable solution. Nor can the world, or the affected populace, wait endlessly for secular forces (the market, the costs of violence, social interaction) to instill reasonableness.

Radha Kumar goes beyond historical analysis of apportioning blame to examine various approaches to brokering peace – in particular the new development-centred approach of 'renewable peace'. Instead of seeking an overall political settlement determined by conditions of war, the current thrust seems to be on identifying windows of opportunity for peace within an ongoing conflict; instead of waiting for the end of war before investing in peace, using each window of opportunity to initiate programmes that might widen the terrain for peace; and realising that a wider regional responsibility for nurturing the transition to peace is crucial.

It is important to note how different this response is from Gandhi's advice to the British – quit. He was convinced that left to themselves Indians could forge new understandings between divided communities that would enable them to live in peace. The idea of partition, of overlordship, of even continuing intervention by outsiders was to him anathema. Evidently, such confidence is shared by few today. All divided societies remain united in their search for external mediators, the preference being for multilateral intervention. One suspects this permits the local leaders to play off the outsiders against each other – a situation often encoun-

tered in Bosnia wherein the Russians routinely vetoed the US-led initiatives and conditionalities.

The merit of Radha Kumar's book lies in its examinations of the details – both of the presupposition and of the intervention packages. Expectedly, this does not make for an easy read, more so for people unfamiliar with local geography, actors and history. Nevertheless we do learn that tangled ethnicities can live in peace only by overcoming their constructed primordialities, i.e., if they are ever given a chance. Also, that interventions, even when well meaning, can contribute to an enhancing, not muting of conflict. What is clear is that the new excitement with ethnicity (following the Samuel Huntington thesis of the clash of civilizations), particularly religion based ethnicity, and the accompanying project of partition, is unlikely to work. Cyprus, Palestine, Ireland, or Bosnia amply prove this.

Harsh Sethi

**STATES, CITIZENS AND OUTSIDERS: The Uprooted Peoples of South Asia** edited by Tapan K. Bose and Rita Manchanda. South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu, (distributed by Manohar Delhi), 1997.

EDITED collections, particularly those based on presentations made at conferences, rarely make for a good book. The contributions are invariably uneven in quality and the editorial introduction faces an unenviable task of providing coherence. Within these limitations, *States, Refugees and Outsiders* serves a useful function.

The lead papers by Barun De, Tapan Bose, Ranabir Samaddar and Ravi Nair provide a useful overview to the refugee situation in the region. And expectedly, while the primary focus remains on the legal regimen governing refugees and their rights, all the contributors emphasize both the human dimension of the problem as also the need to go beyond nation-state fetishism. As Barun De points out, much of this problem has been created by the artificial drawing up of borders and boundaries. Equally, everyone stresses the unsustainability of drawing distinctions between economic and socio-political flows, between migratory and refugee status.

It is crucial to appreciate the history of migratory flows – permanent and seasonal – which have never respected state boundaries. We must remember that it is the drawing up of borders which converted 'natu-

ral' movements into illegal ones, broke up communities, disrupted family and social life, and engendered conflicts and war. Our North East remains a stellar example of this 'blind' and unthinking process of enforcing artificial boundaries. This also, as various commentators point out, created the categories of the 'native' and 'alien', investing in these fluid characterizations the notion of the eternal. Our continuing controversy over the status of Aryans as outsiders, or that of the Muslims as non-Indians, stands testimony to the durability of these notions.

Just because we in India focus primarily on the Bangladeshi Muslim refugee issue, we should not lose sight of the others – Tibetans, Sri Lankan Tamils, Nepalese, Bhutanese, Burmese – as also a host of other smaller groups such as the Afghans and the Chakmas. This is equally true of our neighbours.

While focusing on the palpable lack of 'human rights' in our legal regimen and its implementation – these papers do not totally forget the apprehensions of the 'natives' when confronted with the outsider. Anyone who has been to Karachi cannot escape the impact of the Afghan refugees on the city, its environs and politics. But, as is repeatedly pointed out, erecting fences, or designating people as stateless, expelling them, and denying them legal rights – is no solution.

For once a regional collection on the refugee question deals not only with 'foreigners' in an alien land, but also the 'national' refugees created by economic and social interventions. True, we in India talk most about the Bangladeshi refugees swamping various parts of the country. Rarely do we realise that the internally displaced are far more in number and face the same kind of hostility as the formal outsiders.

A major merit of this collection is the formulation of a draft model national law on refugees under the chairpersonship of Justice Bhagwati. This should go a long way in sensitizing our policy-makers towards modifying their actions and helping humanize the situation. At the least, if these worthies can be made to understand that there are no 'national solutions', we may finally begin to develop a regional consciousness and perspective.

This is a useful collection. One wishes that it was less exorbitantly priced. Rs 600 for a paperback, even in these inflationary times, does put the book out of the reach of individual buyers, particularly activists. Or is that not the constituency that the Forum wished to reach?

Seminarist

**THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES: A Humanitarian Agenda.** A UNHCR Report. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

THE State of The World's Refugees: A Humanitarian Agenda of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) profiles the plight of approximately 22 million people who have been uprooted from their homes across the world. It covers a wide spectrum of issues – refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless peoples. It not only brings out the dilemma of the agency regarding the protection of refugees, but also illustrates why the notion of humanitarian assistance today has precedence over protection of refugees.

Since the end of the Cold War, the space for refugees has been consistently shrinking. UNHCR faces a dilemma between the restrictive approach of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees vis-a-vis what it calls the 'inclusive' approach of the refugee definition formalized in the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) Refugee Convention of 1969.

Since UNHCR derives its mandate from the 1951 Convention, it suffers from a systemic incapacity to address problems pertaining to refugee influxes in Asia and Africa. The individual determination process under the 1951 Convention suited the 'individual political refugees' from the former communist bloc. But it fails to address the mass influx of refugees in former Yugoslavia, the Horn of Africa, Asia, Haiti and Sudan, to give only a few instances.

UNHCR's apparent helplessness in tackling the multiplicity of refugee problems and provide protection to the refugees, whether in Africa or Asia, together with the unwillingness of the North to share refugee burdens proportionately, leads it to invoking humanitarian appeals. The sheer plight of 22 million people, where its humanitarian assistance may be the only lifeline, does evoke sympathy and support. But unlike the OAU Convention on Refugees which is 'inclusive', UNHCR fails to admit that the 1951 Convention is flawed and hence, the fundamental challenge for refugee protection is to address its shortcomings. UNHCR evades this fundamental question and is at sea trying to explain why it distributes blankets, milk, medicines, along with providing 'protection' to the refugees.

The mandate of the agency on internally displaced persons (IDPs), the subject of its concern in Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Liberia, Mozambique, Somalia, Chechnya and Sri Lanka, is

not clear. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as a neutral humanitarian agency is mandated to provide humanitarian assistance and monitor the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II). UNHCR has clearly spread itself too thin on the ground without doing justice to its primary constituency.

The agency's increasing involvement with IDPs appears to take the form of setting up an increasing number of 'safe zones', in both international and non-international conflicts. The creation of safe zones, which have acquired a notorious reputation of being most 'unsafe' is a part of the North's strategy to reduce refugee flows into Europe and North America. The US Navy can, therefore, interdict the Haitian refugees at sea and involuntarily send them to 'regional safe havens' with the concurrence of the government of the country of origin.

While UNHCR did try to respond to the problem of statelessness arising out of political turmoil in the 1990s, it failed to address statelessness in many parts of Asia. Only half out of the over 500,000 peoples of the hill tribes in Northern Thailand possess official documentation that enlists them as citizens, or places them on record as being eligible for future citizenship. They are as stateless as the 65,000 Chakmas and Hajongs in the north eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

In this publication, UNHCR provides information on what it perceives as its success stories. The status of the urban refugees in New Delhi is touted as an example. Its vocational training programme, as an effort to reduce refugees' dependence on subsistence allowance, is highlighted. UNHCR claims that out of 20,000 urban refugees who received subsistence allowance till 1995, only 2500 presently require it. The other 17,500 refugees who are alien to New Delhi have within two years ostensibly learnt the art of survival. An amazing success story! At least two refugees have committed suicide due to economic deprivation in the recent past. Numerous others have taken to doing odd jobs at a pittance, while some have joined the fringes of the Delhi underworld.

To end with a quote from Human Rights Watch: UNHCR 'has worked in conjunction with states to fashion questionable protection measures that come dangerously close to accommodating rather than challenging the global deterioration of refugee protection.'

**Suhas Chakma**

**THE MARGINAL MEN** by Prafulla K. Chakrabarti.  
Lumiere Books, Calcutta, 1990.

**REFLECTIONS ON PARTITION IN THE EAST**  
edited by Ranabir Samaddar. Vikas Publishing  
House, New Delhi, 1997.

THE TWO books under review took me to my childhood in Calcutta—the Great Calcutta Killing, Partition, Independence, and shortly afterwards, my first awareness of ‘them’. They were boys of roughly our age who arrived with their families and lived in the abandoned hutments of a World War II military hospital near the Dhakuria Lakes. They were referred to as colony boys or *colonir chheley* in Bengali because the hutments they had come to occupy without any sanction came to be known as a refugee colony. They were sometimes derogatorily referred to as *phugees* short for refugees; the latter is spelt with a pha—making it *rephugee* instead of refugee in Bengali whose alphabet has no *fa*.

I had read about the refugees from East Pakistan in newspapers since the exodus started and heard about them from my parents who, as political activists, had arranged relief for the arriving groups. The colony boys constituted the first tangible manifestation of their presence. They kept to themselves; we, children of the original inhabitants of the neighbourhood, to ourselves. We never interacted. They watched silently from a distance when we played cricket and football on the fields near the lakes. We never asked them to join; they never came forward on their own.

We had heard of the massacres and the relentless persecution which forced them to leave their homes in what was then East Pakistan, of the brutalities and hardships they had to suffer on the way, and the utterly degrading and inhuman conditions in which they lived on arrival. Yet, despite the sympathy all this bred in us, and the proximity of the hutments to our homes, the distance and the silence remained. They were different not only in their ways but also in their social class; we had our own lives and friends and did not feel the urge to reach out, particularly since the word went around that they were very rough and violent and we had to be careful about their running away with our cricket bats, balls, wickets and footballs.

Rickety bamboo stalls selling tea and snacks gradually came up on Southern Avenue, which went by the hutments, and by the lakes. These were run by them and, we were told, also sold the hooch which they illegally brewed. One evening, returning from an evening stroll by the lakes, we saw a young girl stand-

ing in the darkness under a tree. Gradually there were more of them and every day men came in cars, talked to them and whisked them away. The camp existed for years before the colony boys and their families moved away. The area is now covered by the upper and upper middle class residential area around Vivekananda Park, Southern Avenue and Keyatala Road.

Events similar to those in our neighbourhood were being enacted in a large area of about 100 square miles around Calcutta. Refugees from East Pakistan were arriving in thousands, occupying whatever land they found vacant, setting up what came to be known as squatters’ colonies, doing whatever they could to support themselves. The entire process has been most vividly described in all its pathos by Prafulla K. Chakrabarti in his book, which details the gross inadequacy of governmental efforts to assist the refugees. He shows, with extensive documentation, how the centre responded with cold indifference to West Bengal’s repeated plea for funds for rehabilitation while doing everything possible for West Pakistan refugees. A revealing letter dated 1 December 1949 by Dr. B.C. Roy, then chief minister of West Bengal to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, reads:

‘You are under the impression that your government gave us a large grant for the purpose of ‘relief and rehabilitation’. Do you realize that the total grant received for this purpose from your government in two years—1948-49 and 1949-50, is a little over three crore and the rest about five crore was given in the form of a loan. Do you realize that this grant is ‘insignificant’ compared to what has been spent on refugees from West Pakistan? ... I do say that the grant so far given is insignificant for 26 lakh displaced people because it works out at about Rs 20 per capita spread over two years.

— The letter, and several of its kind, notwithstanding, the situation remained the same and West Bengal had to depend on its own inadequate resources. As a result of this and the apathy, if not hostility, of the people of West Bengal who tended to regard them as intruders, the refugees could not be rehabilitated and integrated into West Bengal’s society. They remained a huge mass of people, isolated in their colonies, displaying—in the author’s words—the ‘lineaments of an external proletariat.’ Dehumanized by their brutalizing experience, they were intensely angry and spawned a teeming population of youth, profoundly frustrated and prone to nihilistic violence. The existence of such a mass of humanity could not have been without explosive social, economic and political consequences.

In this book, Chakrabarti deals with the most seminal of these—the rise of the Communist and Marxist left parties to power in West Bengal. Isolated because of its support of the British war effort following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, and their designation of the erstwhile 'imperialist war' as 'people's war', the Communist Party of India saw a potential power base in the refugees; so did the Marxist left parties like the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Forward Bloc, many of whose leaders had come away just before Partition leaving their political bases behind. The United Central Rehabilitation Council (UCRC), which spearheaded the establishment and defence of the squatters' colonies against eviction drives, developed a highly efficient organization and mobilizing capacity, which became the basic infrastructure for all left political agitation in West Bengal.

The CPI made a sizeable number of members from the UCRC and deployed them on the trade union and other fronts where they immediately made their presence felt. It was the beginning of what Chakrabarti calls the refugeeization of the party. When the CPI split in 1964, the refugee support shifted to the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The refugees formed the backbone of the three important left movements—the Tramfare Enhancement Resistance Movement of 1953 and the food movements of 1959 and 1966. Communists and the Marxist left parties in West Bengal had only partial control over the industrial working class; there was no powerful peasant movement in the state. Their rise to power in West Bengal after the elections of 1967 was primarily due to the support of the refugee population.

Chakrabarti's is a significant original work. He has carried out exhaustive basic research and integrated a vast mass of information in a cohesive schematic pattern. He has not only argued his thesis credibly but brought to bear on it substantive scholarship and an impressive application of the Marxian tools of historical analysis and understanding of the nature and characteristics of the various classes. The book, however, could have done with better editing. There are too many loose sentences. Besides, his own experience of the Partition has deeply embittered him towards Muslims which is reflected in his writing. He feels that all Hindus will eventually be squeezed out of Bangladesh.

Referring to the continuing Muslim migration from Bangladesh, he argues that this has the dangerous potential of generating secessionist movements in areas which may come to have a Muslim majority. This is particularly so because Bangladesh may not remain true to its Bengali cultural consciousness. It may come

to be controlled by Islamic fundamentalists and lose its Bengali identity. This is a possibility, albeit remote. Another possibility is the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in West Bengal, especially if the kind of industrialization that is under way – and on which the author dwells dismayingly – weakens the secular Marxist values which, according to his own admission, have not struck deep roots. Unfortunately, there is no mention of this danger despite indications of the growing strength of Hindu fundamentalism in some of the border districts of West Bengal.

If Chakrabarti regards continued Muslim migration from Bangladesh with alarm, in the chapter – 'Still they come: migrants in the post-partition Bengal' – in the book he has edited, Ranabir Samaddar holds that Bengal has a long history of internal migration, a chronologically deep ecological process. It is now attracting transborder flows by 'creating a vacuum to be filled up by labour across the border and/or demonstrating new avenues in the labour market to be utilized with the help of "transplanted networks"'. He concludes, 'Populations of Hindustan live in a world where partition and migration live in permanent bond, each the vindication of other.'

In the larger framework developed in the introduction, such migration is seen as part of the processes which might mitigate the harsh features of the history Partition has created. That history largely turns on the fact that Partition marked the disappearance of old Hindustan and the creation of South Asia – a decolonized region arranged into a states system. There is a growing feeling, however, of the need for unity and the creation of a South Asian identity for the region to return to 'its history and geography, like one who is returning home.'

Unfortunately, there has never been a common economic space to which the region can return and the question of cultural space raises issues of identity which, when defined in terms of the other, can become problematic. Besides, the regionalization of South Asia has led to a rediscovery of old faultlines and has created conditions which justify the call by a new right to support traditional values and cultural homogeneity, and enables it to harness the politics of identity to conservative goals. Also, Partition has given a boost to a territorial consciousness which has meant classification of areas to be 'guarded, watched, suspected, dominated, released, gazed at.'

All this make a return to unity impossible – a fact which Subir Bhowmik's chapter on the North East underlines while giving a grim idea of the ground realities in the region. Greater hope may lie in what

Samaddar calls 'cultural reflexivities'. One encounters these in literary writings which transcend history and territory, play on memory and dwell on the multiplicity of selves and recall 'Eternal Bengal' – Kazi Abdul Wadud's *Saswata Bangla*. Qais Ahmed's piece translated from Bengali and the translations of the poems by some of Bengal's leading poets, indicate what eternity and reflexivity mean in this context. Sandip Bandyopadhyay's chapter, 'Riddles of partition: memories of the Bengali Hindus'; Pradip Kumar Bose's, 'Partition: memory begins where history ends'; and Subharanjan Dasgupta's, 'Life: our only refuge', supplement them in the discourse mode.

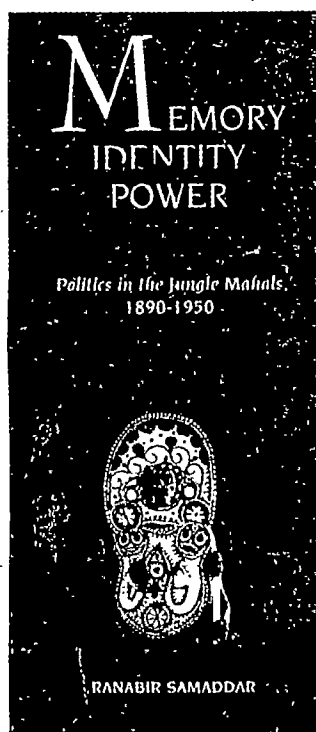
But then culture, despite its transcendental character, is still located in history. And hence the importance of Partha Chatterjee's 'Second partition of Bengal'. Dwelling on the partition's of 1905 and 1947, he states: 'Perhaps, nationalist ideologies lodge themselves most effectively in the body of the modern state when they are able to relegate religion to the secret history of its birth, when they can transform the gross facts of religious majoritarianism into the benign cultural commonsense of everyday life. That perhaps is the condition in which the nation state can make its most magnanimous gesture toward religious minorities by

offering them the promise of universal bourgeois citizenship. To create that condition, a selective erasure from public memory of a certain kind of narratives appears to be a major task of nationalist historiographies.'

While sharing his distaste for narratives fomenting communal sentiments, I would agree that instead of erasing them from public memory, historiographies promote a consciousness that ensures their rejection. Otherwise religious polemicists would perpetuate them. In the end, a few questions for Samaddar. Why use the term contra history in the context of cultural reflexivities? Is contra history outside history? If not, why not call it parallel history since the intimacy he speaks of in the context of multiple selves, is a stream flowing alongside territorial consciousness separated by a strip of historical time which is frequently submerged by overflows of both?

I hope Samaddar will ponder over the matter. Meanwhile, both volumes under review are essential reading for all who seek a better understanding of an event which has defined the locus of the history of the eastern part of the sub-continent for the past five decades and may continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Hiranmay Karlekar



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#### ERRATA

In the article 'Judge and be judged' by Rajeev Dhavan (461, January 1998), on p. 84, col. 3 para 1, the sentence 'For the British and Nehru, it was simply another important constitutional institution of governance', should instead read, '... constitutional institution of state or government'. The error is deeply regretted.



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# Communications

A RECENT dialogue in *Seminar* (461) between two academics, Javed Alam and Suresh Sharma, raises a number of questions about the new kinds of explorations of Partition that are taking place today. Why, the discussants ask, is there a sudden interest in exploring Partition, and why does this privilege memory over history with a capital 'H'? Is it simply a dissatisfaction with the history of Partition as we have known it and its preoccupation with nationalism and the state, or is it that scholars and others looking at Partition in this way are actually making a valuable contribution in creating a new knowledge system, a new way of looking at this important event.

A second set of concerns relates to the ethics of such enquiry: is it morally defensible to excavate memories which have been put away, in some ways resolved? Is it right, to quote one of the discussants, that 'the interviewer chases the *victim* (my emphasis) and draws him by pushing him back into a forgotten memory?' Instead, it is suggested that in order to live in peace and harmony, communities need to leave behind traumatic memories as '*something unfortunate that ought never to have happened*' (my emphasis). While these are the substantial points, a number of others too are raised to which I shall come back shortly. As one of the people implicated in this discussion, I thought I would try to respond to some of the questions the discussants raise, particularly as these come up time and again when one looks at the 'new' work on Partition.

I have been working on Partition for some 13 years now. My main approach to the subject has been through people's narratives of the time, narratives which point to the many issues that conventional histories of Partition have not been able to unearth. These include the histories of women (and no one will argue that the history of Partition so far has not even considered that gender could have played not only a part, but an important, an essential part), of children (a history to which no attention has been paid at all), marginalised people such as untouchables (a history that has lain in the pages of historical sources that contribute to a history with a capital H, but which has been ignored) and various others. These narratives have enabled me to 'see' Partition as more than just a history of political negotiation and manoeuvring; as

more than just the history of the Congress and Muslim League. Rather, they have revealed Partition to be a history also of people, and within that broad category, of different kinds of people – men, women, the poor, the rich, the marginalised.... Why have I, as an individual, become interested in these histories at this time? Is this interest new? Did such explorations exist earlier? Am I merely following a fashion?

Suresh Sharma points out, quite rightly, that it is not as if memoirs and accounts of Partition did not exist in the fifties and sixties. The earliest memoirs date from the fifties: these include Anis Kidwai's *Azadi ki Chaon Mein*, Ebadet Brelvi's *Azadi ke Sain Mein*, Jamil Husain Rizvi's *Pakistan Story*, and somewhat later, Kamlaben Patel's *Mool Suta Ukhde*. To these I would add other accounts, such as Penderel Moon's *Divide and Quit*, and various others. These are only a few among a fairly rich, if not numerous, corpus. While both discussants acknowledge that some material may have been around, they do not see it as part of a self-conscious exploration, of training a historical lens on such materials. This may well be true. But it is worth asking why then has such self-conscious exploration come about now.

To my mind there are several reasons. First, for historians and others like me who are exploring this history, the increasing polarization of Indian society on the basis of religion, has more or less forced our attention towards Partition. In virtually every communal riot that has taken place between Hindus and Muslims in India in recent years, Partition, and particularly selective memories of Partition, have formed a reference. In the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, Partition memories surfaced in an unprecedented way: many of the victims recalled how they had to leave their homes again, how they did not expect to face this in 'their own country.'

It was this that made me, personally, realize how little attention we had paid to those stories that we have listened to time and again in our families. I have no doubt other researchers have followed a somewhat similar, and a somewhat different trajectory. In Surat, Bombay, Ahmedabad in 1992-93, the Hindu right used stories of the abduction and rape of Hindu women by Muslims during Partition to target Muslims, and particularly Muslim women and

children. Could such rape and abduction have been only one-sided? In Bhagalpur in 1989, Partition formed the reference for much targeting of the Muslims. And these are the more collective manifestations.

Take any case in court where a question of Muslim law is involved, and immediately theories of those who subscribed to the two nation theory are pulled out. There is no way we can pretend that Partition is a closed chapter in our history. Instead, what each such conflict brings home to us are questions that have been around, and have remained largely unresolved, since Partition: whose nation is it that we are talking about? How do we understand the geographies of citizenship in this nation? How do we understand notions of home, of country, of family and community?

A second reason is that for historians, who might earlier have been reluctant to approach an event in which they could not easily bring the much cherished (but largely mythical) 'objectivity' to bear on the subject, a study of the trauma and pain of Partition has so far been difficult. But a half century, no matter that it is an arbitrary figure, does and can have some meaning. In this case I think it has served the purpose of providing some distance, so that people can now approach this history with a sensitivity and a responsibility that is essential to any exploration of an event so marked by violence and grief.

There is also the fact that many Partition survivors are now ageing, and while earlier they may have been unwilling to speak publicly about their memories and experiences, that is less so now. I have found that people often want to tell their stories. To my mind, it is all these things that have come together to create a new interest in Partition, and it is this that we are looking at today. The interest is rooted in the political realities of our time, and needs to be understood in that context.

Why, however, the focus on memory? Both discussants worry about this: memory is expedient, shifting, unreliable. How can it replace history? Not only that, but because memory is individual, it can only therefore approximate the discrete experience. Ergo, people like me are 'less concerned with the relation between the discrete and the general.' Rather than making a valid historical exploration – 'which can lead to a knowledge system the way earlier history writing did' – our work is based more on a rejection of history written with a capital 'H'.

I would suggest that this is an almost total, and perhaps willful, misunderstanding of the work of

many people who are studying Partition today. First of all, not all of this work focuses on memory in the way the discussants suggest; both of them are sensitive enough to see that the work that exists cannot easily be swept under one undifferentiated umbrella, yet I do not see them even acknowledge its difference and variety. Second, I think we need to question the 'knowledge system' that earlier history provided us. Without invalidating this system, is there anything wrong in questioning its adequacy, in attempting to expand and stretch its base, in widening its ambit? If there is some way in which history as we know it can actually incorporate the human dimension, can actually build in a way of studying the sociology of pain and emotion, ought we to summarily reject that?

Lest this sound too ephemeral – for after all we are dealing here with nebulous things such as emotions and feelings – there are other, more material reasons why memory is so important. One of the important things about Partition, and to my mind this is why there is so much reluctance to remember it, is because in some way, we are all implicated in the violence. Virtually every family has a history of victimhood, or of aggression. Unlike the Holocaust, there are no clear 'goodies' and 'baddies' here. Yet, the way people choose to remember this event is by 'constructing' (the discussants object to this word, and I have to admit that I agree with them) themselves as victims.

Through the telling and retelling of stories within families, this selective remembering helps strengthen stereotypes and further prejudices. Why is it, for example, that so many second and third generation children who have no reference at all to Partition have internalized stereotypes about Muslims and Hindus in the way they have? Where do these come from? They come, as I see it, from the selective remembering of Partition stories to families, memories that allow you to feel wronged, and to pass on that sense of wrong, memories that allow you to block out your role as aggressor, your own complicity in violence.

It is my belief that unless such memories are confronted openly, unless they are put against other memories, memories of sharing, of friendship, and equally of the violence of one's self, as opposed to only the violence of the other, there is no way we will resolve the troublesome issue of Partition. This is not something that was merely an 'unfortunate happening' that can now be put away. If it was merely that, why does it happen again and again? Krishna Sobti

has said that Partition is difficult to forget, but dangerous to remember. I would add to her statement that it is dangerous, but essential to remember, not only so that we can come to terms with it, but also so that we can actually begin the process of forgetting for, as the two discussants point out, remembering and forgetting are two sides of the same coin.

Why is it that there is no institutional memory of Partition in this country? Because, for the state, Partition was clearly the 'dark side' of Independence. Nothing is served by remembering it. But for us, as historians, individuals, those concerned about how our society is getting polarized, I believe it is incumbent on us to not only remember, but to talk, discuss, to be open about this part of our history and not to pretend that it did not exist. It is in this context that I take strong objection to casting (that word again!) Partition survivors as 'victims', as Javed Alam does.

To represent people who have lived through and survived such violence and trauma as victims, who are merely being manipulated by the unscrupulous interviewer, is to do both sides an injustice. Very few of the people who are working on Partition currently have been irresponsible enough to force others to speak; very few have not been alert, all the time, to the dilemma of how to approach an interview, how much to make public—in short, very few have been irresponsible in the way that is suggested by the discussants. Rather than being fearful that memories of Partition could feed into a reinforcement of a communal consciousness and give strength to communal feelings, it may be more constructive to think of how such memories could be used precisely to counter a communal consciousness.

Another question that arises from the dialogue is: why are the discussants less concerned about the representation of violence in memoirs and fiction. Why is it, for example, that the revival of so much Partition fiction does not give rise to the same concern? Why did the searing despair of Manto's fiction not give rise to this concern about how dangerous it was to expose the violence of Partition? Is it that fiction is seen as somehow being less 'serious' because it is 'imaginary' and not 'based on fact?' Yet anyone who is familiar with the history of Partition knows that virtually all Partition fiction comes out of the direct experience of many of the authors: Krishna Sobti, Ismat Chughtai, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Sadat Hasan Manto, Krishna Baldev Vaid, Quratulain Hyder... the list is long and too well-known to need repeating here. Equally, why should the memoir, the

documentary account, the diary, be less worrying in terms of its exposure of violence than 'memory'? To me, history is the work of many hands: it is equally the work of the image maker, as it is of the writer, the recordist, the fiction writer or of the writer of memoirs... to worry that it is being taken out of the hands of historians and that the knowledge this wide-ranging, interdisciplinary exploration produces is in some way less valuable than the knowledge produced by history with a capital 'H' smacks of a kind of conservatism which I would not have associated with the two discussants.

Finally, for there must be an end and there are too many things that I wish to respond to, I'd like to take up Javed Alam's point where he differentiates this mode of 'doing history' from oral history which, to him, has been part of a larger historical project which 'helped fill up the paucity of data or to enrich it, but it never positioned itself as an alternative to conventional history.' Does the kind of history people like me are 'doing' position itself as an alternative to conventional history? I think not. To say so is to misunderstand what we are attempting to do.

What, I think, we are doing is to raise questions about the way history has been written, who has written such history, about whom, and why. Such questions have been raised by feminist historians for many years now—thus this should not come as a surprise. What we are also asking is: is there any way in which history as we know it, history with a capital 'H', can make room for the small, the individual voice, the bit part players rather than only the major ones? And if so, how? How, in other words, do we reconcile the general with the particular? Is there any way in which the kind of material being uncovered about Partition now can help us to better understand this event, and if so, how does that change, add to, augment the history of this event? After all, all history is about selective remembering—and therefore about selective forgetting. All new explorations, therefore, go back into memory, and explore or attempt to uncover things that may have hitherto remained hidden.

More, to look at oral history merely as something that enhances data and information is to do oral history an injustice. Oral history is about people. People are not data, they are human beings, not, as many historians would have it, informants without names and identities. I see the work I am doing as fitting very squarely within the frame of oral history: it is work that attempts to look at history, to use a

cliché, as if people mattered, to put the narratives of people and their histories at the centre.

To me, people who lived through Partition are the history of the event. How they choose to remember and recount this history is as important as what we have hitherto seen as the 'facts' of this history. How these memories are handed down to us, how we receive them, how we understand them and through them the perceptions of people who have lived through Partition, is crucial to how we respond to the world around us today. If we forget this history because we are afraid of it, or because it may be dangerous to remember, we are, I'm afraid, bankrupting any further understanding of our history for the same argument can be applied to anything. Why look at any history afresh? Instead, what we should be talking about is how we can look at this history, collectively, not individually, and how we can do so with the kind of responsibility and sensitivity it merits.

**Urvashi Butalia**

Kali for Women, Delhi

IN 'Remembering Partition' (*Seminar* 461), Javed Alam and Suresh Sharma voice their anxiety over the revival of scholarly interest in Partition in recent times and the attempts to reconstruct the 'history' of our nation state through oral and literary narratives. But is digging into the traumatic memories of Partition a sadistic-masochistic exercise, as they suggest? No, there is a certain context to the recent scholarly attention to Partition. The context, as I see it, is the recent rise of the forces of Hindutva for whom the nation-community is a natural, homogenized and eternal verity. In such a context it is important to look back at a critical event like the Partition to show how religious communities then were radically redefined and reconstructed, what was at stake, and who were the victims of the homogenizing act of nation formation.

The act of retrieving memories of Partition is not to 'complete' the history of the event, as Alam and Sharma seem to think, but to question our understanding of Partition. For instance, the act of retrieving the experiences of women during Partition is not so much to make visible women or to valorize their victimhood, as to show how the violence accompanying Partition that marked women's bodies was an expression of the intimidation and triumph of one community over another. At a time when women, among other marginalized groups, are being wooed to reaffirm

their religious identities by the Hindu right, Partition narratives point to the danger of women getting co-opted into the patriarchal discourse of communalism.

Alam and Sharma suggest that Partition was marked by a blurring of boundaries between communities, between victimizer and victim, victimizer and saviour. Recent research, on the contrary, suggests that Partition and the events leading up to it were marked by an accentuation and redefinition of boundaries between religious communities. For instance, we learn that the Meos of Mewat were targeted as Muslims and subjected to violence, thus forcing them to give up their earlier ambiguous identity as half-Hindu and half-Muslim. Again, if victimizer and victim were rolled into one, it only goes to show that no community at that point in history was impervious to the discourse of communalism; ambivalent acts of victimizers turning saviours can be explained as residues of more ambiguous times and identities.

Their argument that recalling the trauma of Partition is neither ethical nor healthy, for either the individual or the community, because such traumas are best forgotten is erroneous. To see Partition in clinical terms as trauma, or more graphically as amputation of Mother India, is to refuse to acknowledge Partition as a resolution (as is done in Pakistan), albeit a bloody one, of the 'Hindu-Muslim problem' in pre-independent India. Not only that, it is evocative of the Hindu rights' discourse which laments Partition as an act of marauding Muslims making away with the Hindu *punjab-hoomi*.

In the dialogue between Alam and Sharma, a point often re-iterated is that the (post-colonial) state was not the perpetrator of Partition violence; rather it was the handiwork of common people belonging to different communities in the grip of religious frenzy. They argue that institutionalization of the memory of Partition is neither possible nor desirable because there is no 'distant' agency like the state to apportion blame to (unlike in the Holocaust). This clearly is an uninformed argument. Recent research, especially by Gyanendra Pandey and Shail Mayaram, reveals the post-colonial state's tacit as well as active connivance in the making of Partition violence.

Not only this, recent 'revisionist' historical scholarship emphasizes that the Congress leadership, to ensure a strong centre, itself readily conceded Partition instead of agreeing to a more federated structure that would have involved significant concessions to Muslim majority provinces. Thus to

# In memoriam

## S. Guhan 1933-98

WHEN the collective loss to society due to tobacco smoking is computed, the untimely death of S. Guhan will be the among the biggest losses. Guhan, as civil servant, and then as a scholar and policy analyst, contributed more than most other gifted individuals to the welfare of ordinary people in numerous walks of life. He deserves the gratitude of the nation at large. He will also be gratefully remembered by countless individuals who had the good fortune of working with him. And whenever they think of him, they will undoubtedly smile, recollecting his wit and humour, dry as the drink he liked. Still, his death will be a large item on the tobacco industry's ledger of liabilities because he had so much more to give.

Even after the illness had been diagnosed, and it was clear that his time was running out, he did not give up any of his 'other-regarding' preoccupations and become self-absorbed. He set his keen, analytical mind to devising and refining schemes and finding solutions for some of the most stubborn problems facing the country. He had the ability to intellectually visualise – steadily and as a whole – the big picture into which individual pieces would fit. He knew that research and scholarship is never adequate and potentially limitless. But unlike most academics, he felt that it is policy that lags behind in translating sound ideas already available into practical schemes that are entirely feasible.

Guhan was a rare individual who could translate ideas into action, fully conscious of the origins of those ideas and realities on the ground. He has done more to dispel pessimism about creating entitlements to social protection during a period when fiscal restraint has become the watchword of the state. And he proposed very sensible schemes that would inherently minimise the scope for corruption and help the infirm and the aged, those for whom survival would be impossible without state assistance.

Guhan loved life in a very contagious way. His passion for music, his happiness that hundreds of people could enjoy the best of song and dance during the Chennai season, his services to Kalakshetra, revealed his ability to connect the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of life to compensate for the largely dismal aspects of the ordinary business of living in this country.

Guhan contributed in substantial measure to the Report of the Brandt Commission, the forerunner of several such commissions which have attempted to articulate a global vision. He collaborated with John Lewis in the writing of a history of The World Bank. He was enthusiastic about resurveying villages that had been surveyed in the early part of this century to learn about social processes and change. And during the last five years, Guhan worked with a group of social scientists and the late T.N. Krishnan on a project which, among other things, yielded several good ideas for reforming social security institutions in India.

He brought a light touch to all his work and immensely enjoyed putting down bureaucrats by wearing his academic hat in arguments with them. Equally, he would discomfit academics by bringing them down to earth and cutting off flights of theoretical fancy. Guhan was the first to celebrate the achievements of others, an increasingly rare attribute. It is well that the rest of us should celebrate his personality and achievements.



A smile. A teardrop. A raised eyebrow.  
A flare of the nostrils. A frown. These are  
just a few manifestations of a language  
that transcends the spoken word.

Spontaneously communicating  
feelings like ardour, agony, ecstasy,  
excitement, fervour, fright, passion and  
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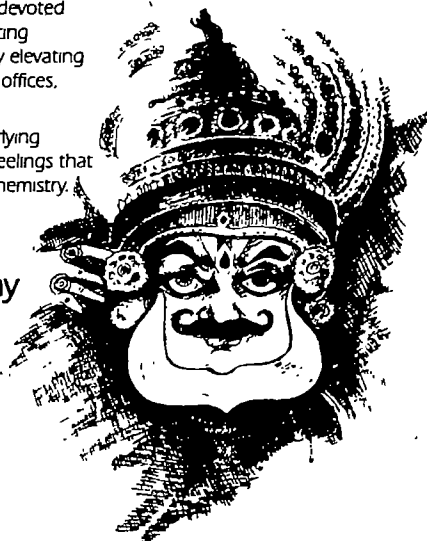


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absolve the state of its role/responsibility in Partition violence and to see it merely as a fire-fighting unit is to refuse to see how the Indian nation state, since its inception, has embraced and institutionalized an ideology that legitimizes violence against minorities.

Finally, this process of reconstruction of memories in recent times is not an arbitrary, unmediated enterprise as suggested by Alam and Sharma. Rather, it is being carried out by researchers self-conscious of and transparent about their politics and location. It seeks to question and puncture the statist perspective on Partition, even as it attempts to analyze Partition violence contextually, without abstracting from its socio-political moorings.

### **Nikhila Haritsa**

Research Scholar  
Bangalore University

I HAVE a fundamental difficulty with what Swami Agnivesh calls the Hindu view of a multi-religious society (*Seminar* 460, December 1997). It seems to me that what he calls a Hindu view of a multi-religious society, in effect constitutes not so much a Hindu as a *secular* view of a multi-religious society.

I will like to press this point home in two ways: (i) by demonstrating that the key elements in his so-called Hindu view are really secular in nature and (ii) by indicating what might constitute the content of a Hindu solution to the problems of a multi-religious society.

A fundamental thrust in Swami Agnivesh's argument seems to be that the problems of a multi-religious society possess two dimensions: (a) how one religion treats other religions and (b) how one religious treats its own followers. In relation to the first—the inter-religious dimension—he identifies *exclusivism* and allied fundamentalism as the main culprits. In relation to the second—the intra-religious dimension—he identifies *exploitation* as the main problem.

He then goes on to examine the first dimension in a way such as to indicate that it *primarily* concerns Islam and Christianity, whose followers are proselytizingly antagonistic to those who do not accept their faith (even if the antagonism is not always active). By contrast, 'generally speaking... a Hindu has no problem living next to someone who believes in an altogether different God' (p. 71). Although he calls upon 'Christianity and Islam to liquidate their missionary apparatus' (p. 72) he calls upon the state to

ensure that such exclusivism not interfere with the freedom of religion and conscience of others. He does not call upon Hindus to do anything in this regard. In other words, he is seeking a secular solution to a religious problem. Strikingly, in neighbouring Nepal, which is a Hindu state, such an outcome has been secured by a blanket ban on religious conversion.

As for the issue of intra-religious exploitation, which Swami Agnivesh identifies as a problem common to almost all religions in India in the form of gender inequality, child slavery, casteism, communalism, consumerism and so on (p. 74), the solution he offers is in terms of the assertion of their rights by the afflicted groups. These rights are human rights. He states: 'There cannot be a Muslim or a Hindu declaration of human rights. Human rights are universal and they have to be constitutionally backed by a secular legislative body' (p. 75). Thus, although Swami Agnivesh claims to take a Hindu view of these issues he ultimately adopts a secular position in relation to them.

What then, one might ask, would constitute a Hindu response to inter-religious and intra-religious issues in a multi-religious society like that of India? As a pluralistic tradition Hinduism may provide several suggestions in these matters (not excluding the secular options!). But permit me to suggest two with a distinctly Hindu flavour.

One Hindu approach to the problem of religious exclusivism, fanaticism and fundamentalism would lie along the lines of introducing a sympathetic study of all the religions of the world in the educational curriculum—an approach promoted by Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Azad and S. Radhakrishnan.

Similarly, another Hindu approach to the problem of intra-religious exploitation could consist of a Universal Declaration of Hindu Rights by the world's religions. After all, if the secular liberal tradition is one source of value formation, the religions of the world are no less in this regard. At the very least a Hindu initiative to proclaim its own vision of human rights and monitor its implementation would seem to follow naturally from Hindu premises.

I therefore feel that while the Swami has identified the problems like a Hindu, his solutions have not stretched beyond the procrustean bed of secularism.

### **Arvind Sharma**

Faculty of Religious Studies  
McGill University, Montreal

# Backpage

WE are now ready to move into a new stage of politics. The hurly burly of elections, the great Indian *tamasha* is now behind us. Jaded by the overkill of election hype – defections, unprincipled alliances, grandiose and empty promises, the marketing of caste, community and dynasty, apologies and appeals to loyalty – the citizen as voter can now safely move from being participant to bystander. Now starts the stage of the buying and selling of our chosen representatives.

Rhetorical flourishes of *samajik samrasta*, *swadeshi*, stability, *suraksha* and *shuchita* have not quite managed to hide the glaring absence of issues which govern the life chances of our citizens. Few in the fray thought it worthwhile to talk about the politics of resources – land, water, forests. No one cautioned about the increasing fragility of food security – the dangerous shift away from food crops or the degradation of arable land. Or for that matter talked about basic education and health. Evidently our abysmally low HDI does not concern the political class.

Years of sustained grassroots work for increasing transparency and accountability may well influence local contests, but come the elections to the Lok Sabha, across party spectrum, corruption and criminality don't quite become handicaps in selection of candidates. Winnability is all.

The Congress did deny tickets to some heavyweights accused of involvement in the 1984 Sikh carnage, or to its ex-prime minister for 'sleeping' when the Babri Masjid was pulled down. But it had no qualms about depending upon the same worthies in its campaign. Worse, no shame about touting as its achievements the performance of its government under a leader now jettisoned.

The main player in the hustings for the 12th Lok Sabha, the BJP, comes across as no better. Attack Laloo Yadav for the fodder scam, but ally with Jayalalitha. And worse, support alleged don D.P. Yadav, only the other day accused as master criminal, just so that Mulayam Singh Yadav may be tied down. One is entitled to be sceptical about its claim of providing stable and clean governance when each one of its new-found allies stands opposed to its basic principles – Ram Mandir, Article 370, Uniform Civil Code.

As for the UF, it would be best to re-christen it as the Left and Federal Front. For, whatever else the

results might foretell, its only constituent with claims to a national status, the Janata Dal, is ready to vanish. Nothing epitomises the fading away of a party which led three governments (not including 1977) than its prime minister having to depend on the Akali Dal-BJP for victory.

With most credible opinion polls now forecasting a hung Parliament, it is Sonia Gandhi more than 'the man India awaits' who has been pitch-forked onto centre-stage. No one had quite expected the silent sphinx from 10 Janpath to convert a lack-lustre contest into a keen one. No charges – her Italian origins, the fear of Rome Raj, Bofors, apprehensions of dynastic rule, even the fact that she is a mere primary member, no elected leader, of the party – stopped her from galvanising crowds. Votes and seats are another matter. Clearly the Congress, whom everybody had written off, is still in the reckoning.

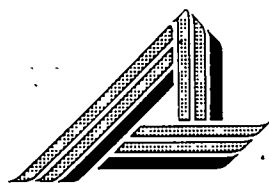
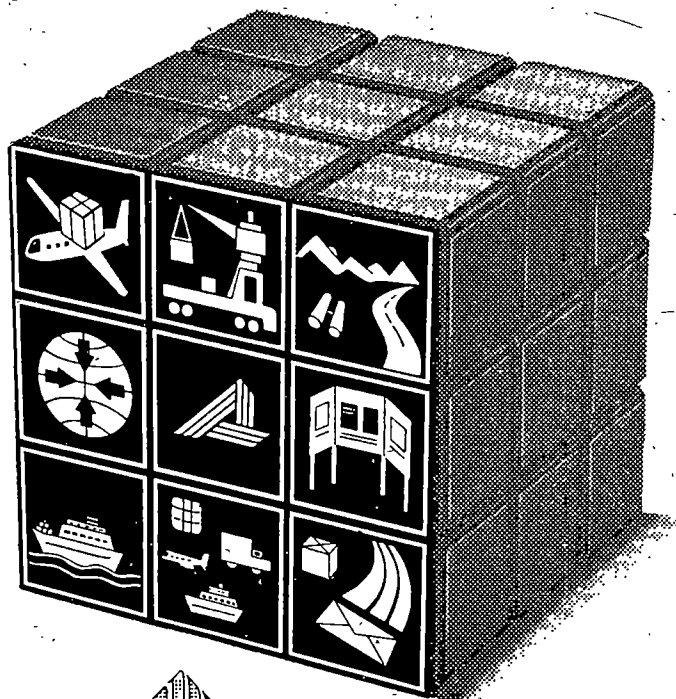
Whatever the final complexion of the post-poll arrangements, whichever party wins the coveted top spot will be constrained in following up its agenda. The BJP is already hamstrung by regional allies and efforts to widen its social base. If forced to woo other formations, necessary if it wants to cross the magic half-way mark, its core – the RSS and VHP – is unlikely to be pleased. The lure of power is what may save our secular fabric.

And perchance we get a Congress-led regime (no one gives much of a chance to another UF led coalition), the search for an acceptable leader and the jockeying for ministerial berths should be enough to ensure that effective policy shifts are not on the agenda. All we can be sure of is that extra-constitutional diktats will be difficult to resist.

What then should we do, other than remain periodically bemused and often pained bystanders. Cynical or tired withdrawal is no answer. Nor does electoral politics exhaust the political space. A variety of citizen groups attempted to intervene in the process of candidate selection and electioneering. Let us continue this engagement with promoting policy agendas on issues that matter. Given the state of our polity, we may soon get another chance. It is, after all, no one's claim that politicians are knowledge proof.

Harsh Sethi

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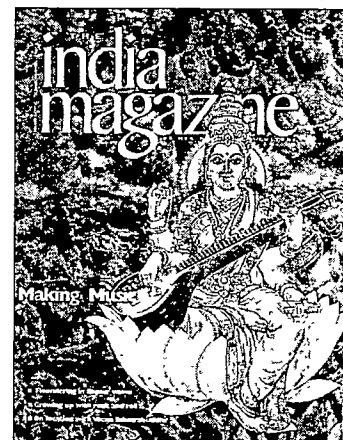
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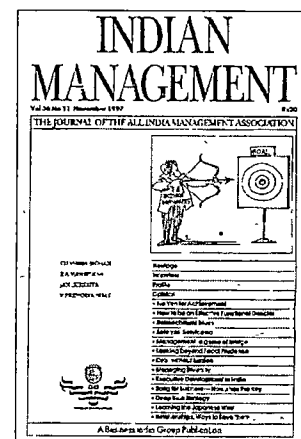
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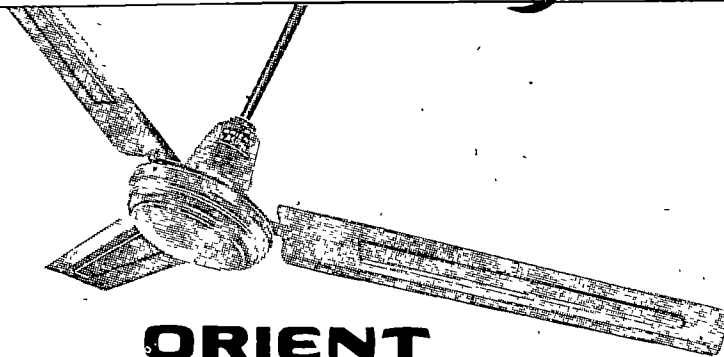
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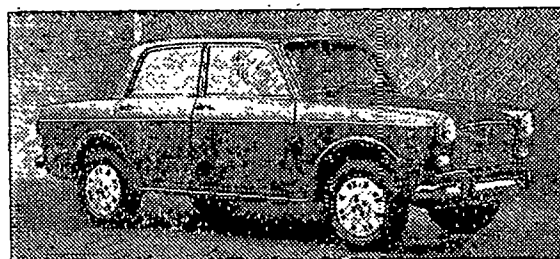
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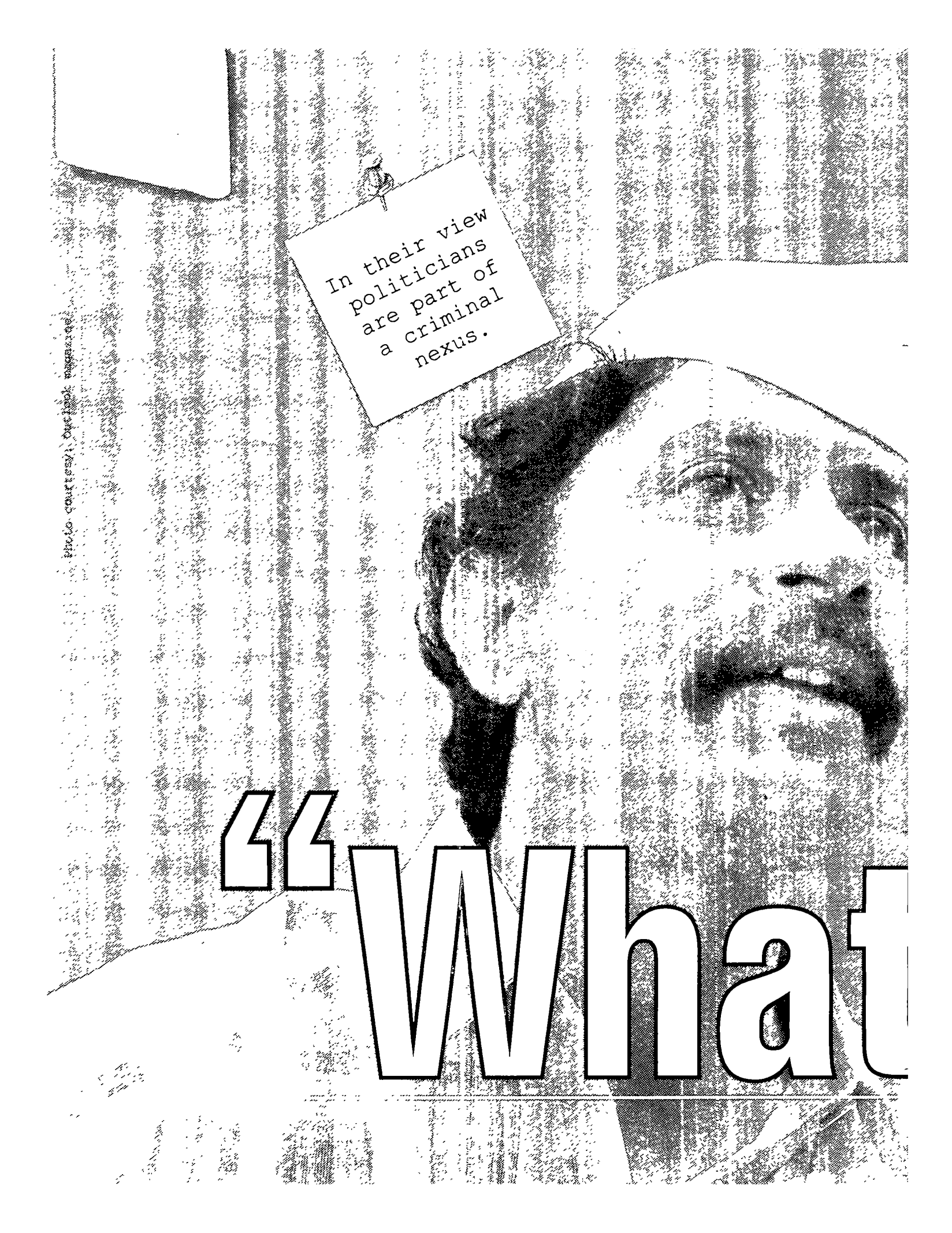
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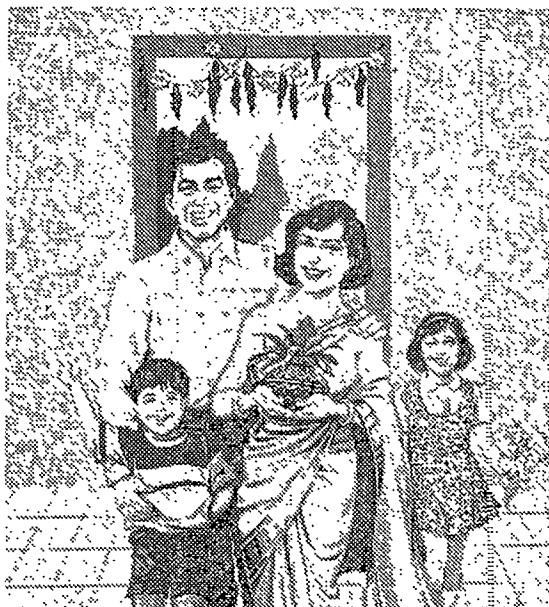
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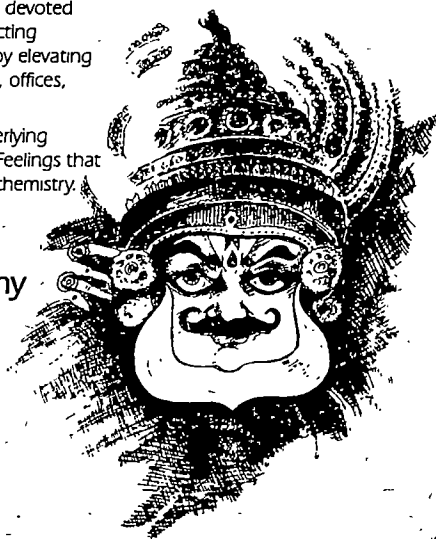
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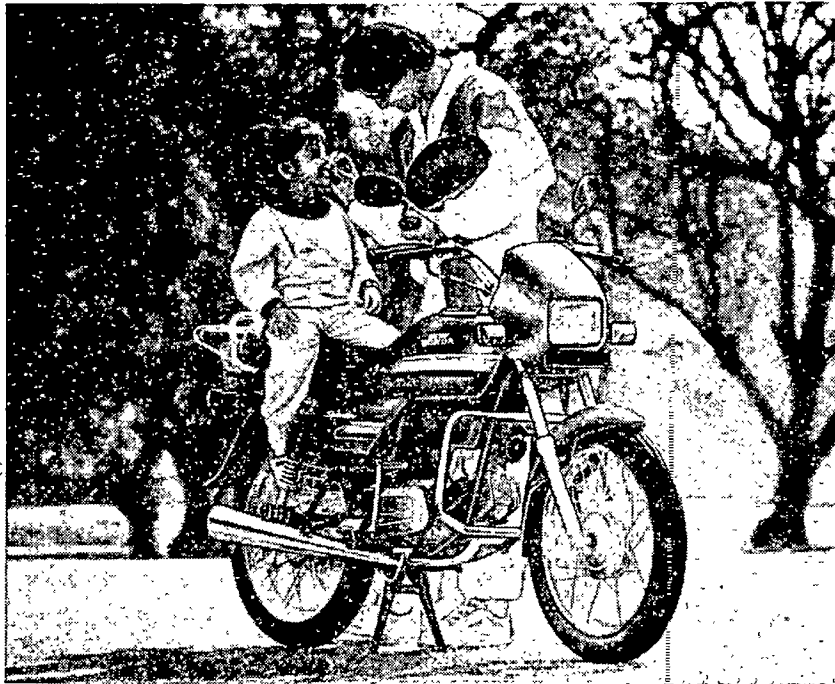
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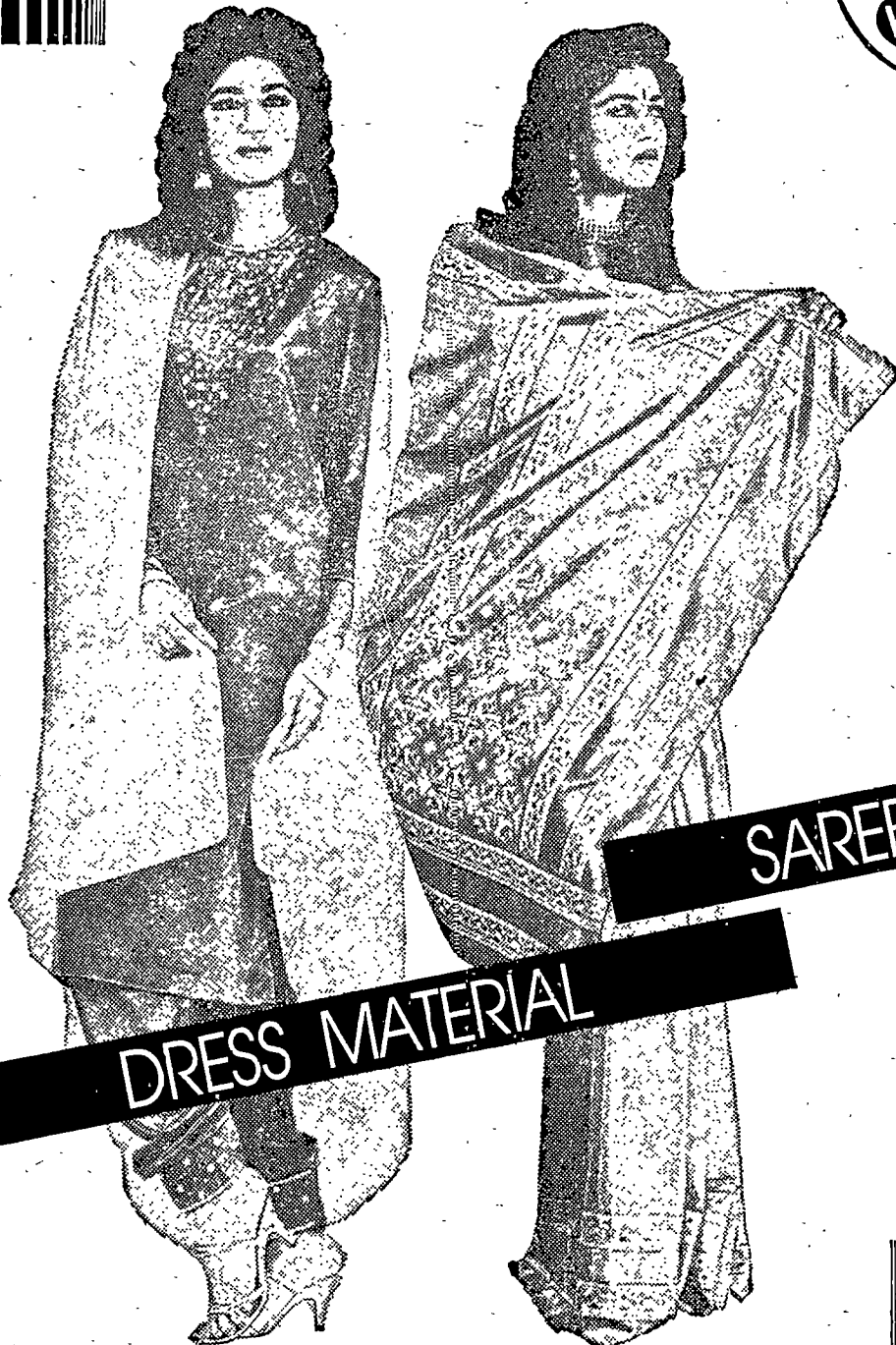
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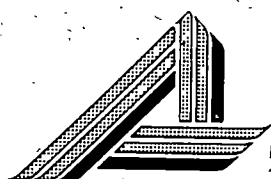
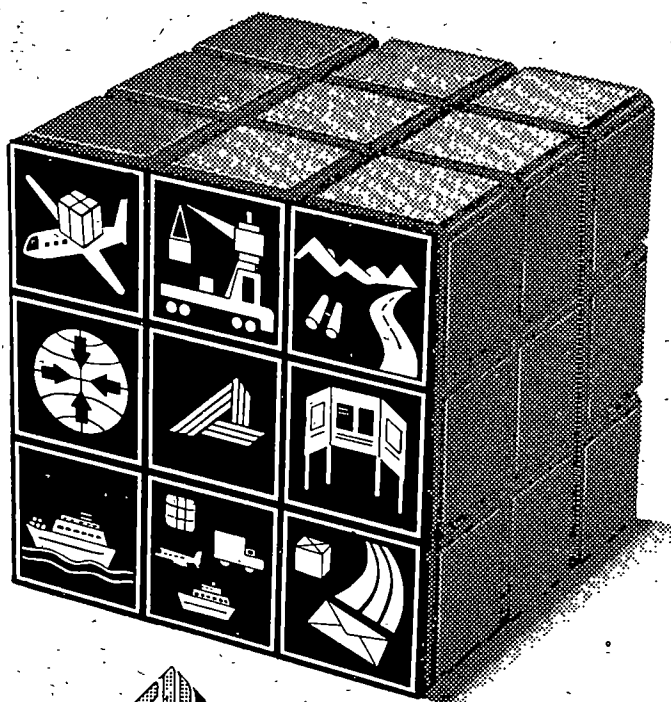
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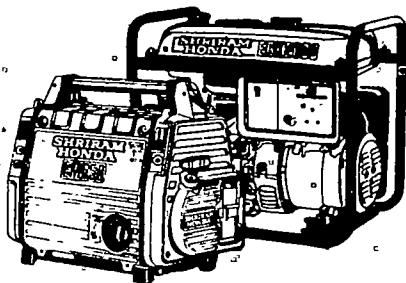
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## NEXT MONTH: UNCERTAIN FUTURES

# 464

## RIGHT TO EDUCATION

a symposium on

the state of basic education

in our country

### symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
A short statement on  
the issues involved
- 14 **SQUARING THE CIRCLE**  
Jean Dreze, Professor of Economics, Delhi School  
of Economics, Delhi
- 18 **WHERE ARE WE AT?**  
Ratna M. Sudarshan, Senior Economist,  
National Council of Applied Economic Research, Delhi
- 22 **CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS**  
Nalini Juneja, Fellow, National Institute of Educational  
Planning and Administration, Delhi
- 27 **RETHINKING REVOLUTION IN BIHAR**  
Bela Bhatia, Visiting Scholar, Centre for the Study of  
Developing Societies, Delhi
- 31 **TEACHERS' ASSOCIATIONS**  
P.G. Vijaya Sherry Chand, Professor, Indian Institute of  
Management, Ahmedabad
- 36 **A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT**  
Jandhyala B.G. Tilak, Senior Fellow, National Institute of  
Educational Planning and Administration, Delhi
- 42 **EXTERNAL FUNDS, INTERNAL CONFLICTS**  
Vinod Raina, physicist; co-founder Eklavya, Bhopal
- 49 **THE RURAL SCENE**  
A. Vaidyanathan, Emeritus Professor, Madras Institute of  
Development Studies, Chennai
- 54 **PROMISES, PROMISES**  
Vimala Ramachandran, Associate Professor,  
Indian Institute of Health Management, Jaipur
- 64 **EXTRACT**  
from *Human Development in South Asia 1998*
- 72 **A DIALOGUE**  
on education held by the  
Centre for Civil Society, Delhi
- 77 **A REPORT**  
by Avik Ghosh on the second Asia Regional  
Literacy Forum
- 79 **BOOKS**  
reviewed by Usha Jayachandran, Vimala Ramachandran,  
Shashank Vira and Ratna M. Sudarshan
- 85 **FURTHER READING**  
compiled by Nirmal Malhotra, NIEPA
- 87 **IN MEMORIUM**  
John Bissell 1931-98
- 90 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdhury  
of Dilip Chowdhury Associates

# The problem

AT the beginning of this century (1906), liberal social reformer Gopal Krishna Gokhale pleaded for making elementary education compulsory. Today, 50 years into our existence as an independent nation, we are nowhere near ensuring that a majority of our children are in schools. And this notwithstanding constitutional commitment (of course, only in the Directive Principles of State Policy) to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years by 1960, a target date which is routinely pushed back every decade.

It is not just India, but South Asia (with the exception of Sri Lanka) that has emerged as the most illiterate region in the world, with 400 million illiterate adults (nearly one-half of the world total) and 50 million out-of-school children (about one-third of the world total). South Asia has by now the lowest adult literacy rate (49 per cent) in the world, behind even sub-Saharan Africa (57 per cent). This when in 1970, South Asia was ahead with a literacy rate of 32 per cent compared to 27 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

These macro figures hide glaring regional, caste, class and gender disparities. India's Hindi belt accounts for the bulk of its illiteracy cake. And perchance someone argues that the region is poor, it is worth asserting that Kerala or Himachal Pradesh or Mizoram have a far better educational record than Punjab or Maharashtra. More likely, the problem has to be located in the lack of will of our political masters, in insufficient application on the part of those who run the various schemes and programmes. Politics, howsoever understood, seems to have little space for such concerns.

Even those who blanch at the equation of literacy or schooling with education (the reference here is to

the immense innate wisdom of our illiterate masses – incidentally the only time our political masters and policy-makers make any laudatory reference to the common citizen) rarely argue against the social costs of illiteracy. We have clear evidence that education leads to many social benefits – improvement in standards of hygiene, reduction in infant and child mortality rates, decline in population growth rates, increase in labour productivity, greater political empowerment and democratization, and an improved sense of national unity. Any economist will tell you that the rate of return on education, particularly primary education, even more on the girl child, is high. And yet....

Is it that we do not know what to do? This, one suspects, is a claim which is difficult to sustain, given dozens of commission reports and innumerable innovative experiments across the country. From the Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commission Reports to the National Education Policy; from the Gargoti experiment to Kishore Bharti; from Mahila Samakhyas to Lok Jumbish – we have a full list of what needs to be done, properly prioritised.

First, the quantitative challenge. If the goal of education for all (EFA) is to be achieved by the year 2000 A.D., we need to get 65 million children in South Asia in to school. This requires massive investments in schools, teachers and basic educational materials. It is estimated that the region needs 410,000 new teachers every year, three-fourths of them women.

Second, we need to attend to the quality aspects. As important as ensuring enrolment is to ensure retention, given that nearly 40 per cent of all children who do enter school drop out in the primary stage itself. Again the solutions are known – schools within easy



distance, flexible timings to suit eco-cultural cycles, having at least one female teacher per school, textbooks in local language/dialect – one can go on. Above all, there is a need to invest in the teacher, not just in pay and perks, but in making it possible for her to teach, and well.

At the experimental level, the innovations are spectacular. In Rajasthan, the Shiksha Karmi project hired young middle-school pass youth to teach working children in accessible night schools by involving the community and local NGOs. Evaluations showed that both quantitative and qualitative retention was high. Even in the 'socially backward' regions, the hunger for learning is undeniable. Parents are keen to send children to school, including girls, and pay if needed. What we must ensure is a stable and engaging environment.

It is often pointed out that poorer children cannot afford to attend school. That they need to work not just to supplement meagre family incomes, but also to feed themselves. In addition to the usual affirmative action policies, some states initiated a mid-day meal programme. In Kerala, families keep aside cereals, coconuts and bananas as their contribution to the school. Where the community is interested, they actively participate in making the schools work. Surely, it is not our contention that other regions and states are uninterested in their children?

For years now it has been suggested that teachers be hired locally, be made accountable to the local authority, and their jobs be made non-transferable. All easy, it seems. And yet, politicians, bureaucrats and teacher unions resist this 'obvious' move. Transferring teachers is lucrative for many. As for teachers,

they feel this would negatively affect their bargaining strength.

Is it that this would require resources beyond the reach of our poor societies? Is this why, in the decade of the nineties, we have finally started relying on externally funded projects, mainly The World Bank's District Primary Education Project? Is basic education not the duty of the state, a commitment that it is reneging from? After all, what does it cost? The Human Development in South Asia report for 1998 estimates that it would take \$1 billion a year or a mere 0.3 per cent of the combined GNP of South Asia to do the trick. Can we honestly claim that this is beyond us?

The argument is not the currently fashionable one, of World Bank bashing, that 'glamorous' foreign-aided projects distort national priorities. It is just that, rhetorics apart, most projects suffer from conceptual, managerial and administrative weakness which impair their effectivity. Even the much talked about National Literary Mission, after initial success, seems to have whimpered out. Concurrent evaluation and course correction forms no part of our implementation strategies.

Finally, should basic education be made compulsory, a fundamental right? Opinions vary, but it is indisputable that unless state and society is compelled to live up to the constitutional commitment, our elites will find some excuse or the other for non-performance. For them the social costs of illiteracy may not matter. They and their children already access this good. But for the poor it does.

Basic education is a necessity, not just instrumentally, but in itself. It can also be fun, a joy. We cannot afford to let time slip by, or let decision-makers off the hook. This issue of *Seminār* debates what is involved.

# Squaring the circle

JEAN DREZE

AROUND this time last year, someone suggested that India might celebrate 50 years of independence by making elementary education a fundamental right. The proposal was widely applauded, then fell into oblivion as the Parliament preferred to celebrate the event with interminable speeches. The situation reminded me of a label I once saw on a second-hand television set in a shop window: Sound Only.

The fact that the proposed constitutional amendment on the fundamental right to education has been gathering dust for so long speaks volumes about the priorities of political leaders. Nevertheless, there is a good chance of the amendment being passed relatively soon, given the mounting public pressure behind it. The real challenge, however, is to put this amendment into practice. One aspect of this challenge (probably not the most demanding) is to deal with its financial implications. This is where the government seems to be

painting itself into a corner, made up of three conflicting priorities: selective fiscal discipline, liberal teacher salaries, and the fundamental right to education.

The first priority is selective fiscal discipline. The adjective 'selective' is important because comprehensive fiscal discipline would call for fairly obvious measures that are beyond the currently acceptable bounds, such as drastic cuts in subsidies for the privileged, reduction in military expenditure, and a sharp increase in income taxes. These options would come up against powerful lobbies and are therefore quietly ignored most of the time. Instead, the fiscal disciplinarians train their guns on soft targets.

How imperative fiscal discipline really is in the first place is an arguable matter. For the followers of the IMF school of economics (where IMF seems to stand for 'Ignore Market Failures'), fiscal discipline has become a sacred cow. This prescription, in turn, is usually justified in terms of concern for

inflation. Why inflation is such a dreadful monster is rarely explained and, disconcertingly enough, economics textbooks have remarkably little to say on this subject. As Frank Hahn put it in his distinguished treatise on *Money and Inflation* fifteen years ago, the belief that inflation is an evil in itself 'is a belief for the anthropologist and psychologist to unravel — economists cannot help.'

**T**o avoid misunderstanding, I must clarify that what economists mean by inflation is a situation where prices and wages are rising over time. This differs from a situation where prices are rising but wages are not. The latter is certainly undesirable and people are right to protest when it arises. But inflation as defined here is not necessarily bad, at least when the rate of increase of prices and wages is relatively low. For instance, in India during the 1980s, prices were rising at about 10 per cent per year and wages a little faster, and it could be argued that the economy was none the worse for it. China's economy, with even higher inflation, was among the most successful in the world. In general, there is no evidence that moderate levels of inflation reduce economic growth, or have other major economic or social costs.

Why then, has a sophisticated institution such as the IMF fallen into the trap of absurd recommendations such as balanced budgets and zero inflation? I believe that the answer has to be sought not from anthropologists or psychologists, but from political scientists: it has something to do with the aversion of corporate financial institutions to inflation, and with the political influence of these institutions. As Jagdish Bhagwati candidly said in a recent interview, 'Wall Street views are very dominant in terms of the kind of world you want to see.'

All this may seem to be at a tangent, but I mention the point because there is some danger of India falling into a similar trap of inverted priorities, where the control of inflation is given overriding importance at the expense of real social issues (such as education). In European countries, this inversion of priorities has taken astonishing proportions, with finance ministers showing far more zeal in bringing inflation down from (say) two to one per cent per year than in fighting mass unemployment. Similar attitudes seem to be slowly taking root in India. Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, for instance, concluded a recent assessment of the state of India's economy with the words: 'Above all, we are justifiably proud of our success in keeping inflation as low as 4 per cent in the past six months!' I am not sure that this 'success' is really worth more than passing mention in a review of India's economic performance.

Having said this, there is a strong case for fiscal discipline in India. More responsible and equitable patterns of taxation and expenditure could indeed be of great benefit for the masses. For this to happen, however, fiscal discipline has to take a more comprehensive form, going beyond the selective focus on soft targets.

**O**ne aspect of the current policy of selective fiscal discipline has been to combine austerity in some fields with largesse in others. Public sector salaries have been one object of this largesse, culminating with the Fifth Pay Commission report and its repercussions. The fact that this massive giveaway to the middle class came from parties that are seen as left on the political spectrum gives much food for thought. Also interesting is how the government almost instantly found the financial resources required to back these massive salary bills (nota-

bly by raising various taxes, and cutting expenditure across the board), at a time when there is supposed to be no extra money for social spending.

School teachers are by no means the main beneficiaries of the revised pay scales. Nevertheless their salaries, already increasing at about 9 per cent per year in real terms in the 1980s, are making another great leap forward. Is this a good thing? It could be argued that higher teacher salaries help to improve teaching standards. But since the higher salaries are paid *irrespective* of a teacher's effort, this incentive effect is likely to be weak.

**S**ome recent studies confirm that teacher performance in government schools bears no relation to their salaries. It is also worth remembering that in rural India, school teachers already belong to the top decile of the income scale, making it hard to justify further material privileges. Teachers certainly need better work conditions, but this should take the form of an improved school infrastructure, better training, less crowded classrooms, more respect from the education bureaucracy and greater support from the parental community. These steps would do a great deal more than salary increases to improve the teaching standards and job satisfaction of teachers.

Let us now put two and two together. Selective fiscal discipline has effectively put a cap on the growth of public expenditure on education (as a share of GDP, the latter has in fact *declined* year after year since 1991-2). On the other side, the rapid growth of teachers' salaries continues unabated. Given that these salaries account for over 95 per cent of total expenditure on elementary education, the Education Ministry has only one way to make ends meet: slow down on new teacher appointments. This is exactly

what has happened in recent years, leading to a steady decline in the number of teachers per child.

**T**he current slowdown in teacher appointments is in conflict with the professed commitment to elementary education as a fundamental right. Indeed, one aspect of this right is that all citizens are entitled to minimal schooling facilities at a reasonable distance from their homes. This requires a major upgrading of the schooling infrastructure, including a large increase in the number of teachers. As things stand, schools are so under-staffed that many of them provide little more than basic child-minding services. Single-teacher schools are an extreme manifestation of this phenomenon, but the problem is not confined to these schools.

There are various estimates of the financial implications of the right to education, which are largely driven by teacher requirements and teacher salaries. According to the Saikia Committee, the fundamental right to education calls for an additional expenditure of Rs 40,000 crore over the Ninth Plan. This estimate, which precedes the Fifth Pay Commission report, and makes no allowance for salary increases, is probably on the low side. But even this modest figure is way above what the Education Department can hope to get for elementary education as things stand. In short, there is no sign of any official willingness to face up to the financial implications of the fundamental right to education as estimated by various expert groups and committees.

What is the way out of this impasse? One prediction is that the proposed constitutional amendment will be quietly dropped. This, in my view, is unlikely, if only because the amendment has overwhelming public support. Also, the fundamental right

to elementary education has already been recognized by the Supreme Court in the Unnikrishnan case (1993), giving Parliament little choice but to recognize it too.

A more optimistic prediction is that the fundamental right to education will prevail, and that public pressure (perhaps in the form of a Public Interest Litigation) will bulldoze the financial obstacles. This would be an interesting denouement, especially if it constrains the fiscal disciplinarians to explore new means of achieving their goal. Much as I would like to believe in this outcome, it is however a hard wicket, because the government has another way of wriggling out of this situation. This is to give formal recognition to the fundamental right to education, while giving it a diluted interpretation which minimizes the responsibilities of the state.

**T**he door is already open to this course of action. The proposed constitutional amendment, in itself, does not specify exactly how the fundamental right to education is to be implemented. It leaves it to individual states to formulate relevant legislation for this purpose. And while some guidelines about the content of such legislation are contained in the Saikia Committee report, these guidelines are unlikely to have much force in practice.

Some states will probably confine themselves to compulsory education laws that focus on the responsibility of *parents* to send children to school. Others may specify that all children are entitled to minimal schooling facilities, but without going very far in specifying what these facilities are (e.g., in terms of convenience of access, physical infrastructure, teacher-pupil ratios and teacher qualifications). This will make it possible for the state government to get

away with providing the missing facilities in the form of cheap arrangements such as 'non-formal education centres' and low-paid *shiksha karmis*.

**A**s a matter of fact, several states are already making quiet but persistent moves towards reliance on low-cost schooling as a means to universalize elementary education. In Himachal Pradesh, for instance, 'voluntary teachers' employed at about half the salary of a regular teacher have already been recruited on a large scale in government schools. In Rajasthan, *shiksha karmis* are widely used as substitute teachers in remote villages. Low-cost schooling is probably most developed in Madhya Pradesh, which now has at least four different types of alternative schooling arrangements: non-formal education centres sponsored by the central government, *shiksha karmis* posted in formal schools, 'alternative schools', and informal schools created under the state's innovative 'education guarantee scheme' (EGS). These different facilities are not necessarily *aimed* at providing low-cost alternatives to formal schools (some of them have a completely different inspiration), but there is a strong pressure to *use* them in that way.

How effective are these low-cost schooling facilities? The first generation of such facilities, consisting of non-formal education centres sponsored by the central government, were a fiasco. Several studies indicate that a large majority of these NFE centres are non-functional. To cite only one, the recent PROBE survey of schooling facilities in the Hindi speaking states found fewer than ten functional NFE centres in 188 survey villages (on paper, India has more than 2.4 lakh NFE centres, i.e. one for every other village or so). Even in the 'functional' centres, the level of teach-

ing activity was minimal. So much so that, in many cases, local residents and even school teachers were unaware of their existence.

In 1,221 sample households, the survey found only two children who were actually enrolled in a NFE centre. And the survey did not uncover a single case of a child who had 'graduated' from a non-formal education centre to a formal school, even though one of the main goals of NFE centres is precisely to make this possible. Notwithstanding these and other clear indications of the failure of the programme, the creation of scores of additional NFE centres continues unabated – the current target is 3.5 lakhs. As a top-level bureaucrat from the Department of Education candidly put it at a recent seminar in Delhi, 'non-formal education survives because it is a profitable industry.'

The second generation of low-cost schooling facilities, which encompasses the state-specific initiatives mentioned earlier, is somewhat better planned and more promising. Voluntary teachers in Himachal Pradesh, for instance, seem to play a useful role. The same applies to informal schools set up in Madhya Pradesh under the 'education guarantee scheme', though it is too early to assess this initiative with any confidence.

A distinction needs to be made, however, between the role of these facilities as a *temporary supplement* to the mainstream schools, and as a *permanent substitute* for the latter. Providing alternative learning facilities for drop-out children, for instance, is certainly a useful thing. So is posting a shiksha karmi in an under-staffed school, as a provisional arrangement. But it is quite another matter to argue that non-formal schooling facilities provide an adequate *substitute* for formal schools.

Until recently the last argument would have had few takers, but its political acceptability is rapidly gaining ground as the imperatives of fiscal discipline put pressure on the state to fall back on low-cost schooling arrangements. The obvious danger of 'universalizing' elementary education in this way (bearing in mind that the low-cost facilities are almost invariably aimed at underprivileged children) is that it is inequitable, unless the low-cost schooling facilities are of the same quality as the mainstream schools. Failing that, the two-track formula may *institutionalize* the disparities of educational opportunities which universal elementary education seeks to *eliminate*.

Whether low-cost schooling facilities can deliver education of the same quality as the mainstream schools is an open question. It is not impossible in principle: the lower costs of these facilities are usually due to lower salaries, and, as argued earlier, salaries need not bear much relation to teaching standards. But the *sustainability* of these salary differentials is doubtful (the lower-paid teachers being quick to organize and demand higher salaries, as is already happening in each of the three states mentioned earlier), not to speak of their equity. The sustainability issue also applies to the institutional arrangements that support these alternative facilities.

The onus of proof that low-cost schooling can deliver quality education in an equitable and sustainable manner lies with the advocates of this strategy. Meanwhile, public pressure should focus on an undiluted version of the fundamental right to education, based on the inclusion of *all* children in a common schooling system. And if this formula is costly, so be it.

# Where are we at?

RATNA M. SUDARSHAN

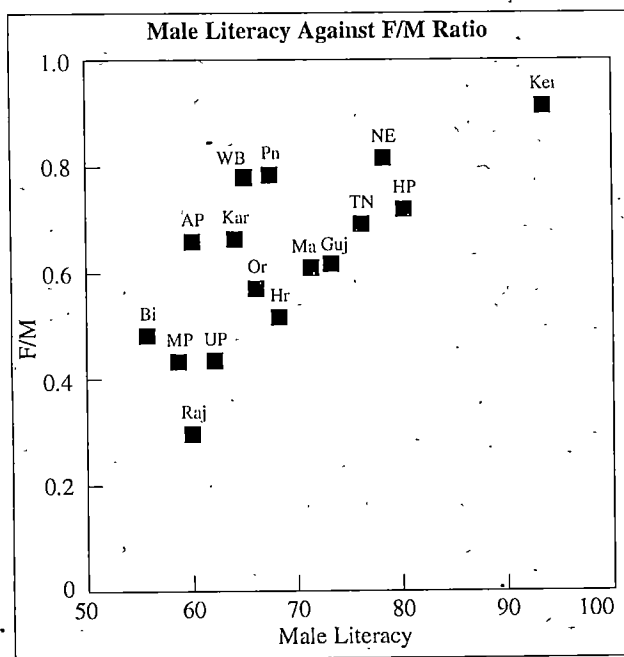
It is usually accepted that 4-5 years of schooling is needed for durable literacy. On the assumption that 'basic education' has a simple objective, i.e. a literate population (as opposed to an educated one), this paper presents some of the patterns observed in our achievements in moving towards this objective. The data presented here is drawn from an NCAER survey conducted in 1993-94 for rural India.

Taking the country as a whole, in rural India 65.6% of males and 40% of females over the age of 7 are found to be literate, or a little over half (53.5%) of the population. Not surprisingly the highest levels of literacy are found in Kerala, at 93% of males and 86.5% of females, considerably above any other state. Himachal Pradesh and the North East follow, with 79.4% (M) and 57% (F) in Himachal Pradesh, and 77% (M) and

60.9% (F) in the North East. At the other extreme are Bihar, with 56.6% for males and 28.8% for females; and Rajasthan with 60.4% for males and 19% for females. The states with low levels of male literacy are also the ones with the highest gender gap. This relationship is shown in the diagram using data at state level and the ratio of female to male literacy as a measure of the gender gap in literacy.

These regional disparities are well known. The data shows that literacy levels increase steadily as income increases. At a household income level of under Rs 20,000, 57% of males and 32.5% of females are literate; at levels over Rs 86,000 the corresponding figures are 86.4 and 62.2. The increase in literacy is more pronounced for females, since the levels for males are always higher than for females. Thus, in Rajasthan, the level for females from households with average per capita income per annum of under Rs 1500 is 13% and this goes up to 36% for households with income over Rs 6000. In contrast, the difference between land owners and landless is not very sharp; it is 68% (M) and 41.3% (F) for land owners and 60.4% and 37.6% for landless. However, landless wage earners are less fortunate.

The lowest level of literacy among different occupation groups is among daily wage earners at 48.7%



\* This paper presents data from the NCAER Human Development Profile of India: inter-state and inter-group differentials (November 1996). I would like to thank Dr. Abusaleh Shariff for his suggestions. Any opinions expressed here are entirely personal.

(M) and 27.2 (F) and the highest among the salaried/professional at 85% (M) and 58.2 (F). The compounding of vulnerabilities due to occupation, gender and region is reflected in the literacy rates of female wage earners in the states of Bihar, U.P. and Rajasthan. Thus, the levels for male wage earners in Bihar is 29.3%, in U.P. 39.4% and in Rajasthan 44.9%. In the case of females, the rates are 10.3 in Bihar, 9.7 in U.P. and only 6% in Rajasthan.

Caste groups show the lowest levels for STs (51.3 M and 26 F) with the levels being much higher for non SC/ST Hindus (72.3 M and 45 F). Likewise, taking religious groups, for all Hindus the level is 65.9 (M) and 39.2 (F), for Muslims 59.5 (M) and 38 (F) and for Christians 85 (M) and 76.5 (F).

More immediate environments make an impact. In households where both parents are educated, the literacy levels are 89.5 (M) and 74.7 (F) while for households where both are illiterate the levels are 15.4 (M) and 8.7 (F). As between parents, a literate mother has greater impact on child literacy. In villages with a low level of development, the levels are 56.1 (M) and 26.5 (F) and in those with a high level the figures are 74.4 and 52.7.

**C**learly, the average achievement levels hide wide variations. Any concern with strengthening the educational system calls for some understanding of diverse performances. It is relatively easy to postulate that if education levels can be raised, appropriate employment opportunities made available, and higher levels of income generated, then we have the potential here for a dynamic virtuous circle of ever increasing levels of education, productivity and income. But for those who are not part of this growth dynamic, the incentives for education may be low.

From the evidence of village surveys, it does not appear that there is a lack of motivation, in that people are well aware of the potential benefits from education. These are perceived as being of different kinds. The most widespread is the demand for functional literacy, especially among women: the ability to read numbers, communicate with officials, write letters, use ration cards, all of the diverse ways in which literacy and numeracy are almost essential in a monetized and increasingly urbanized economy. Literacy or education is also seen as a safety net, again especially for women: it may not be seen as an essential attribute to play the role of mother, wife and partner in work, but in case of misfortune, some level of literacy will afford better chances of earning an independent income.

**T**he perception of education as a means of getting a better job and hence provide upward mobility in the society is perhaps the most problematic, because even while it offers an effective tool to encourage greater participation in school, it can simultaneously lead to the unforeseen impact of unfulfilled expectations. Finally, education may be seen as a means of empowerment: control over one's life in more than just an economic sense.

Restricting ourselves to functional literacy, a demand for which is enough to ensure that children are enrolled in school, it is difficult to explain why we are still well short of universal enrolment. If the problem is not demand, is it that there are no schools? Or do they exist only on paper? Or is schooling too expensive?

As with literacy, there is considerable variation in enrolment rates. Among the poorer performing states, we find the greatest gender disparity in Rajasthan, with the ever enrolment rate being 78% of males and 41.9%

of females. Corresponding figures for U.P. are 73.2% (M) and 53.4% (F) and for Bihar 64.7% (M) and 51.2% (F). Enrolment of course, is only half the picture: it is well known that irregular attendance and discontinuation or dropout are persistent problems. Discontinuation rates<sup>1</sup> are highest among landless wage earners—7.5 for males and 13.7 for females, as against 4.2 for males and 6.7 for females among land owners. Among the states, the highest rates are found in Andhra Pradesh, for landless wage earners at 14% for males and 20.9% for females. Regional differences may be due to opportunities for employment of children, but one striking fact about discontinuation needs to be noted. These rates are found to be low for children in the age group 6-11, and significantly higher in the 12-14 age group, a pattern observed in all states. For rural India as a whole, the differences are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1		
Discontinuation Rates (6-14 years)		
	Rural India	
	M	F
6-9 years	0.71	1.01
6-11 years	1.68	2.70
12-14 years	10.84	17.07

The implication is that if children can be enrolled in school at a young age, there is a good possibility of imparting 4-5 years of teaching before the social and economic pressures that result in dropout mount high.

**T**his data can be supplemented with data from another survey carried out by the NCAER (MIMAP-India 1995)

1. The more commonly used expression, 'drop out rate' is not used here, and the term 'discontinuation rate' is used instead, because drop out rates are generally calculated per annum; the figures given here however are an average of all those who discontinued schooling at any time in the ages between 6 and 14 years.

which shows that participation in both paid and unpaid work is not significant for children under the age of 10. The argument that child labour is behind the low rates of enrolment and high drop-out is therefore a shaky one, at least for very young children. The argument that compulsory schooling would reduce child labour, or that it is the only way of doing this, may well be correct for children over 10 or 12; but the data seems to suggest that even without a reduction in the incidence of child labour, there is no good reason why children under ten should not be in school. The only exception might be in the few areas of very high incidence of child labour, e.g. matches, fireworks; but these do not explain low enrolment all over the country.

The data suggests that (a) for children below 10, it is difficult to explain non-enrolment in schools by

recourse either to excessive work burdens within the household (care of siblings, household chores) or paid work outside the home (see Chaudhry 1996). The connection between work participation rate and levels of enrolment is therefore low. (b) Taking all children between 6-14, it seems that the correlation between work participation rates and discontinuation is positive. This is illustrated in the tables below, using data at state level.

This brings us back to a concern with incentives. If motivation is high, as suggested earlier, why do enrolment rates remain lower than can be explained by children's work or household chores? The quality of schooling is clearly one possible factor. Another is the cost incurred in sending children to school. This has been estimated at an average of Rs 378 per pupil per household per year, and

is mainly on books, stationery and school dresses, followed by coaching and fees. Although government schools do not charge fees, other expenses remain. The average expenditure in government schools is Rs 317, in government aided schools Rs 391, and in private schools Rs 742. The significance of these amounts can be better seen in comparison with the average levels of income: among wage earning households for instance, average earning per day was found to be Rs 24.

Overall, most children are in government schools (67.9%); another 22% are in government aided schools and only 9.8% are in private schools. But the relative importance of government schools is decreasing. A comparison of NCERT data for 1986 with NCAER data for 1994 suggests that in a few states there has been very significant change in relative importance

TABLE 2

Work Participation Rate, Enrolment and Discontinuation: Rural India (Male)				Rural India (Female)			
States	WPR	Enrolment	(6-14 Years) Discontinuation	States	WPR	Enrolment	(6-14 Years) Discontinuation
Rajasthan	1.0	78.0	3.1	Kerala	0.5	98.0	2.0
Himachal Pradesh	1.2	95.5	1.8	Himachal Pradesh	0.6	90.0	2.2
Kerala	1.3	99.2	1.5	Uttar Pradesh	0.8	53.4	5.6
North East Region	1.9	84.6	2.9	North East Region	1.0	76.3	4.1
Uttar Pradesh	2.2	73.2	3.3	Rajasthan	1.1	41.9	6.6
Haryana	2.5	83.8	3.8	Bihar	1.2	51.2	4.1
Bihar	4.0	64.7	2.6	Haryana	2.3	72.3	4.6
Madhya Pradesh	4.4	68.5	7.3	West Bengal	2.3	65.1	6.5
Orissa	4.9	78.5	6.2	Punjab	3.0	84.4	6.1
West Bengal	4.9	67.0	5.9	Madhya Pradesh	4.1	55.8	9.0
Gujarat	5.3	85.3	5.6	Orissa	4.2	63.4	9.3
Punjab	5.7	89.0	4.8	Gujarat	5.0	74.5	9.5
Tamil Nadu	6.3	90.9	7.5	Maharashtra	5.8	82.3	8.4
Maharashtra	6.9	88.1	5.9	Tamil Nadu	7.5	84.3	14.8
Karnataka	7.7	90.6	6.8	Karnataka	7.8	75.1	9.1
Andhra Pradesh	10.0	85.1	8.2	Andhra Pradesh	10.3	73.8	12.1
<b>Rural India</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>77.1</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>Rural India</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>64.8</b>	<b>7.6</b>

Source: NCAER/HDI Survey, 1994.

Definitions: 1. Ever Enrolment Rate (EER)

Ever Enrolment Rate is the proportion of children who ever got enrolled in school, at any level, who were aged 6-14 years at the time of survey. This rate will be higher than the Enrolment Ratio estimated by the All India Educational Survey.

2. Average Discontinuation Rates

- 20 Average Discontinuation Rate is estimated as the percentage of ever enrolled children who discontinued studies at any time in the age bracket 6-14 years. Since these rates are the average for a 9 year period and the rate of discontinuation is higher in early years, they are bound to be low. The Average Discontinuation Rate multiplied by 9 can be compared with one minus the retention rate given by other sources. WPR is calculated using usual status definition.



over this period. In U.P., government schools have fallen to 56% from 83.7% with an increase in aided and even more in private schools. In West Bengal the decline is from 71.5% to 20.5%, the increase being mainly in aided schools. The percentage of private schools has also considerably increased in Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Andhra and Kerala. The implication, that (some) people are willing to spend more on schooling, might also mean that inequities are increasing.

**M**ost of the variations noticed above are not surprising and represent essentially the combined impact of various factors. At the individual level, expectations from education depend very much on life experiences of the parents and anticipation of a child's future roles. It is not surprising to find a higher value being placed on education in households with educated parents, in more developed and higher income states, among the salaried and professional classes, and among boys. The last reflects a persisting belief that the primary ambition for a girl is that she should manage her marriage well; if education contributes to this, as it will if levels of education among males goes up, then its value will increase. But, for boys the demand for education is not as derivative as it appears to be for girls and is more closely linked to its influence on future employment and earnings.

Literacy or basic education is a first essential step in developing human capital and capability. The impact is cumulative and apparent over time. Thus some studies have reported the positive influence literate grandparents have on the children's schooling. The ability to articulate, define and express in language is essential to human capability as we understand it. From a social standpoint there is considerable incentive

to increase allocations to education. The financial outlays needed to provide schooling at existing quality to all children currently not in school is estimated at roughly Rs 74.5 billion. Using these estimates an outlay of 3.2% of the GDP is needed for universal primary education (NCAER/1994; p. 192-3).

**B**ut if education is left to individual choice alone, only the more successful (people, groups, regions) have a real stake in its expansion. It is in the public good aspect of education that any hope of achieving universal literacy lies. It is only community norms that could draw into school the children who at present are described as 'nowhere children' – not in school, not at work (Chaudhry 1996). These norms compel a certain kind of behaviour: they require action without any definite return to the individual, but social disapproval if violated.

Why does our society not clearly and actively support universal schooling? In a society where caste and occupational status are definitions of identity, virtually impossible to shake off, the one available route to all to improve and change life chances is through education. So we are now caught in an apparent dilemma. Universal schooling, if it could be implemented overnight, would leave us all in the same place: only we would be literate and numerate. Some other attribute would then determine if we could get a better job and increase our income.

In a sense, this brings us back to the question of incentives or motivation. Although it was argued earlier that motivation levels are high, it is apparent that this is not independent of expectations. Improving the quality of schools, expanding coverage, and introducing incentives may attract more children into school. At a policy level, the claims made for the social

and economic outcomes of higher levels of education/literacy are not small. They include expectations that fertility levels will fall, productivity will go up, and that the rate of economic growth will increase. 'One Indian study (Loh 1995) even found that the impact of a single additional year of workforce education was a 15% increase in economic output' (World Bank 1997, p. xvi). Such statistical correlations are presented as though no change is needed in the curriculum or the methods of teaching, although both expert assessments and practical experience suggest that these are fundamental to expectations that are premised on changing attitudes and behaviour.

**I**n aiming for universal basic education, as one essential step in expanding capabilities, the challenge before policy-makers is therefore twofold; first, to put together the resources needed; and second, to recognize the danger in projecting unrealistic expectations before the people. Basic education may, or may not, lead to better jobs, higher income, a different way of life. What is needed is the motivation to be literate or educated for its own sake, or at most for the functional needs of daily living. In this sense, expectations need to be toned down, not further raised.

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# Constitutional commitments

NALINI JUNEJA

IN 1997, with the spotlight suddenly on the 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill, which seeks to add a fundamental right (for the first time since Independence) to the Constitution of India, the attention of the nation has been drawn to the constitutional and legal basis of education in India.

The Constitution provides a large number of rights and freedoms to the Indian people. Certain civil, political and cultural rights and freedoms are secured as fundamental rights enforceable against the state through constitutionally guaranteed remedies, i.e., they are justiciable. On the other hand, certain other rights perceived to be largely social and economic in nature, have been listed as Directive Principles of State Policy and are not justiciable through courts of law. These rights, in other words, if denied or neglected, cannot be procured by the citizen her through the courts. Thus the classification of the rights of the citizen into these two categories, could be interpreted as placing hierarchical values on these rights relative to each other.

Education for the masses is referred to in the Directive Principles of State Policy, wherein in Article 45, the Constitution directs the state to endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution, free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years.

It is our view that if due attention is to be given to education, it must be made a fundamental right. Addressing some common questions and misperceptions regarding laws for compulsory education, this paper tries to point out that political will determines the manner in which laws are enforced. In fact, the very act of placing education in either category of rights can well be perceived to be the primary expression of such a political will.

This political will was evidently not in favour of education for the masses when the Constitution was being framed and the right to education was deleted from the list of fundamental rights proposed by the sub-committee on fundamental rights of the Constituent Assembly in 1947. It may be worthwhile to replay the scene which occurred 50 years ago and judge in hindsight if our dismal record in mass education should not be traced to this fateful day.

In April 1947, the sub-committee on fundamental rights of the Constituent Assembly had, after due consideration of its importance and justiciability, placed the Right to Education among the list of justiciable fundamental rights as Clause 23 of its final report.

The scene which one will flashback to is a meeting of the advisory committee of the Constituent Assembly (21-22 April 1947) chaired by

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in the Hall of the Parliament House.

The Scene: Making education a fundamental right (Take 1).

The Date: 21-22 April 1947.

The Occasion: Meeting of the advisory committee on fundamental rights.

The House is meeting to consider clause by clause, the report of the fundamental rights committee. The 'right to education' has been recommended as a fundamental right. In his brief introductory remarks, the Chairman, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel directed the advisory committee: 'The committee has recommended a very elaborate set of rights and clauses for adoption or for your consideration. But I feel it would be better if we confine ourselves or restrict ourselves to the rights which are actually considered necessary, more or less according to law, and not go into detailed description of theoretical rights which are not enforceable at all.'

**I**t is now the turn of Clause 23 to be taken up for consideration.

'Secretary: 23. Every citizen is entitled as of right to free primary education and it shall be the duty of the State to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution for free and compulsory primary education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years. M. Ruthnaswamy: Is this a justiciable right? Suppose the government has no money?

Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar: I want the deletion of this clause.

Govind Ballabh Pant: I suggest that this clause be transferred to Part II. It cannot be justiciable. No court can possibly adjudicate.'

There is both irony and pathos in this little scene. Pathos, for with this scene the curtain falls on half a century of effort spent towards the accep-

tance of compulsory education for the masses. The best known was Gokhale's attempt in 1906 to push the first Compulsory Education Bill through the Imperial Legislative Assembly, the subsequent passing of the act in 1917, and the eventual placing of a law for compulsory education on the statute books of every province in British India.

Irony, for what could be more ironical than for such a right to be denied to the people by our own people after winning the war for compulsory education against the British government.

**W**hat is more, as evident from the 'scene', this right would have been altogether deleted from the Constitution had it not been for the timely suggestion of Govind Ballabh Pant that it be transferred to the list of non justiciable fundamental rights (later to be termed as Directive Principles of State Policy). Pathos and irony intertwine here with the realization that in this scene one witnesses the genesis of Article 45 of the Constitution. Also, to the stage being set as to how 'seriously' this non-justiciable right to free an compulsory education would be viewed in the future.

In fact, K.T. Shah, a member of the fundamental rights sub committee, in 1947 wrote a note of dissent to the formation of two categories of rights, and had expressed an apprehension that, 'The non-justiciable rights,' to which education was now relegated, 'would remain as no more than so many pious wishes.' He had further pointed out: 'Given this differentiation, the Union and Union governments will be encouraged to stress or invent excuses why any one of these non justiciable rights should not be given effect to. By keeping them on the Statute Book without making them imperative obligations of the

State towards the citizen, we would be perpetrating a needless fraud, since it would provide an excellent window dressing without any stock behind that dressing.'

Very strong words indeed. One wonders what he might have said about the way in which some of the other non justiciable fundamental rights have been implemented.

In the same note of dissent, Shah (1947) had gone on to emphasize the importance of a right being a justiciable one if it is to be considered a right at all: 'Once an unambiguous declaration of such a (justiciable) right is made, those responsible for it would have to find ways and means to give effect to it. If they had no such responsibility placed upon them, they might be inclined to avail themselves of every excuse to justify their own inactivity in the matter, indifference, or worse.'

**I**n attempting to trace how the directive to provide 'compulsory education' was translated into practice, one finds that only about half the states and union territories have even passed laws making education compulsory (Table 1). Today's generation is barely aware of the existence of these laws. A recent study carried out just prior to the introduction of the 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill, found that over 90 per cent of the officers dealing with the administration of education were unaware that their state had a compulsory education law (Juneja, 1997).

If the officers presiding over education today are not even aware of the law and due process for ensuring free and compulsory education, can the state of mass education in the country be expected to be any better than it is?

The compulsory education laws stipulate that surveys be regularly

conducted to identify children who should be in school; that notices be issued to parents informing them that a seat has been allotted to their child in a school. This is to be followed up by enquiries to ascertain whether the child is going to school, and if not, the reason for non-compliance. Had such a procedure been regularly followed; had there been a sufficient number of officers checking on attendance, carrying out surveys, showing concern, finding solutions to problems; had there been enough schools and teachers, enough concern for learning, suf-

ficient money allocated to education, perhaps the universalization of education would not have been a concern for us today.

While it is certainly true that legislation alone cannot bring children to school, history shows us all too starkly that a firm foundation of constitutional commitment is a primary necessity for bringing the school to the child. This alone will create the conditions to ensure that free and compulsory education is actually provided to all children.

We are again at the same juncture of

trying to make education a fundamental right (except that more water has flowed under the bridge since then). People are again asking some basic questions: 'A majority bench of the Supreme Court (in the case of *Unnikrishnan J.P. v. Andhra Pradesh*, 1993) declared education up to the age of 14 to be a fundamental right, so why introduce the 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill now?' 'The child must have the right to education — no one disputes that, but surely we should remove "compulsory" — otherwise wouldn't we just be punishing the parents who are already so poor?' 'Do we really need to make it a fundamental right? Don't so many of the states have compulsory education laws? If the government is really serious, why doesn't it just enforce these laws?'

The very fact that people are asking such questions is a good sign and signifies, thanks to the media, a greater public awareness of some of the issues — and a need to clarify others.

There is, understandably, a debate on the need for amending the Constitution. But the right to education has not only already been declared justiciable by a verdict of the Supreme Court, the government is also being sued for it (*Satyaj Pal Anand v. Union of India and others* (w.p.(c) No. 81/94). While there is much to be said on both sides, the soundest argument was articulated by former Chief Justice Rajinder Sachar, at a seminar held at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, in October 1997. According to Justice Sachar, a judgement of a court, like all judgements, can be reviewed by a larger bench in some other case. Given this situation, if the right to education is not to remain vulnerable to review, it may be better to place it in the Con-

TABLE 1

Compulsory Education Acts in Force in States and UTs of India

S/UT	Name of Act
1. Andhra Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh Education Act 1982 (Act No. 1 of 1982).
2. Assam	The Assam Elementary Education (Provincialisation) Act, 1974. (Assam Act No. 6 of 1975).
3. Bihar	Bihar Primary Education (Amendment) Act 1959 (Bihar and Orissa Education Act (I of 1919) as amended by Bihar Act XVI of 1939 and Bihar Act XVII of 1946 and Bihar Act IV of 1959).
4. Goa	The Goa Compulsory Elementary Education Act, 1995 (Goa Act No. 4 of 1996).
5. Gujarat	Gujarat Compulsory Primary Education Act 1961 (Gujarat Act No. XLI of 1961).
6. Haryana	Punjab Primary Education Act 1960.
7. Himachal Pradesh	The Himachal Pradesh Compulsory Primary Education Act 1953 (Act No. 7 of 1954).
8. Jammu and Kashmir	The Jammu and Kashmir Education Act 1984 (Act No. XI of 1984).
9. Karnataka	The Karnataka Education Act 1983 (Karnataka Act No. 1 of 1995) (First published in the Karnataka Gazette Extraordinary on the 20th day of January, 1995).
10. Kerala	The Kerala Education Act 1958 (Act No. 6 of 1959) (As amended by Acts 35 of 1960, 31 of 1969 and 9 of 1985).
11. Madhya Pradesh	The Madhya Pradesh Primary Education Act 1961 (Madhya Pradesh Act No. 33 of 1961).
12. Maharashtra	The Bombay Primary Education Act 1947 (Bombay Act No. LXI of 1947) (As modified up to 30th April 1986).
13. Orissa	Orissa Primary Education Act 1969 No. 15.
14. Punjab	Punjab Primary Education Act 1960 No. 39.
15. Rajasthan	The Rajasthan Primary Education Act 1964 (Act No. 31 of 1964).
16. Tamil Nadu	The Tamil Nadu Compulsory Elementary Education Act 1994 (Act No. 33 of 1995).
17. Uttar Pradesh	United Provinces Primary Education Act 1919* (U.P. Act No. 7 of 1919). United Provinces (Dist. Boards) Primary Education Act 1926* (U.P. Act No. 1 of 1926).
18. West Bengal	*Adapted and modified by the Adaptation of Laws Order 1950. West Bengal Primary Education Act 1973 (West Bengal No. 43 of 1973).
19. Delhi	The Delhi Primary Education Act 1960. Act No. 39 of 1960

(as per information available till November 1996)

stitution, from where it cannot be removed without the consent of a two-third majority of the House and much public debate.

**C**oming to the second question, people often do not make a connection between the right to education and compulsory education. Compulsory elementary education for children is related to, but distinguishable from, a mere right to education, which could also be applicable to adults. Hence, while systems exist in several countries to enforce elementary education for children, adult education is not, as a rule, compulsory since adults can choose whether or not they want to take advantage of the educational facilities provided for them. In the case of children, the right to education is protected by compulsory education because children have no way of asserting that right for themselves, when employers, or parents or even governments, through neglect, ignorance or greed pay no attention to this need.

The concept of compulsory education necessarily implies a responsibility on the part of the authorities to ensure compliance with the law and a responsibility on the part of the parent to cooperate. Laws for compulsory education generally make four things mandatory. One, the government must provide the required facilities for education; two, the child is not to be employed in a way so as to hamper the child's education; three, parents must allow the child to receive education; and finally the government is to ensure this right of the child to education by securing these three conditions till he/she is 14 years of age and better able to make a choice. This is what is compulsory about compulsory education. And as for parents who are confined in jail, none of the state laws in India for making education free and com-

pulsory have any such provision. If anything, the laws are too lax. After an elaborate procedure of enquiry to establish whether the parent can but will not send the child to school, only a paltry fine can be charged.

Many people wonder why the government does not enforce the compulsory education laws that it already has, instead of trying to amend the Constitution. Actually, rather than saying 'the government' one should really be saying the 'state governments', because 33 governments of states and UTs are involved and as many state laws for enabling education are to be made compulsory.

When the Constitution of India came into being, education was a state subject. It was only in 1976 that it was transferred to the Concurrent List, which also implied that in case state

laws differed from the central legislation, the laws of the Centre would prevail. Therefore, before 1976, only state laws existed for the provision and governance of mass education and even today, in the absence of any central legislation, it remains for each state to perceive the need for and to decide whether it will enforce its compulsory education act. As things stand, almost half the states and UTs have not even passed any such laws.

As for the question: Why didn't the states which had compulsory education acts, enforce them? Though people believe that the states never enforced their compulsory education acts, data presented in Table 2 shows that many of these states not only enforced these acts but also sent notices, conducted enquiries, issued attendance orders and penalized some of

**TABLE 2**  
**Compulsory Education in Uttar Pradesh: Coercive Measures Taken**

Years	No. of notices issued	No. of attendance order passed	Number of Prosecutions			No. of attendance officers
			For non enrolment	For non attendance	Fines realized	
	11	12	13	14	15	16
1949-50	33,610	66,815	10,354	20,290	13,688	301
50-51	1,27,367	63,579	7,165	8,856	13,984	305
51-52	1,44,612	61,148	10,165	11,538	13,189	258
52-53	1,44,899	62,814	8,723	15,721	13,571	262
53-54	1,64,485	59,827	7,657	15,394	14,454	258
54-55	1,77,042	62,559	6,484	11,309	14,132	250
55-56	1,59,739	65,814	6,372	9,071	12,596	268
56-57	1,74,544	64,016	7,726	10,719	15,167	287
57-58	1,78,170	76,971	6,780	8,127	10,962	287
58-59	1,68,701	73,868	6,758	10,234	8,532	268
59-60	1,56,263	73,949	5,810	9,869	7,714	291
60-61	1,48,648	70,666	6,238	10,054	23,801	298
61-62	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
62-63	145,838	66,282	5,154	11,261	5,650	299
63-64	Data not reported state wise this year					
64-65	N.A.	N.A.	6,419	5,946	6,559	494
65-66	1,18,943	43,906	2,078	3,061	2,117	214
66-67	1,10,911	45,006	2,397	2,971	10,797	240
67-68	3,75,881	35,998	2,680	3,272	2,528	336
68-69	1,15,003	48,360	3,370	3,494	2,492	606
69-70	3,29,675	46,816	3,576	2,766	2,332	614
70-71	74,007	32,480	2,039	2,795	2,319	225

Source: Education in India (1949/50 - 1970/71), Ministry of Education, Government of India.

those who did not send their children to school.

Perhaps the implementation of these acts may have been 'low key'. Nevertheless, data such as in Table I exists at least for the states of Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Orissa, West Bengal, Bombay (Maharashtra) and Gujarat. It should, however, be clarified that compulsory education was never enforced throughout a state at any one time. Compulsory education acts can be enforced over specific areas through notification by local authorities. For this reason, it cannot be stated that education is compulsory in India, or for that matter, even in a state. Compulsion can only be enforced, at least according to the present acts, in a local area through a due process of notification. As the data shows, compulsory education acts were enforced in at least some parts of all the major states up to 1971-72.

**T**he question that one should be asking, therefore, is not, 'Why didn't we enforce...' but, 'Why did we stop enforcing these acts?' That is another story (Juneja, 1997). Suffice to say that at one point of time there appeared to be no other option for policy-makers but to discourage the enforcement of compulsory primary education in the states.

What is pertinent to this discussion on the constitutional and legal basis of education in India, however, is that the enforcement of compulsory education, even though mandated by the Constitution (but non-justiciably), *could* be stopped. On the other hand, had the right to education been justiciable, not only would every administrator have known the law, but as K.T. Shah had so pithily pointed out 50 years ago, 'those responsible for it would have (had) to bestir themselves to find ways and means to give effect to it.'

Therefore, by inserting the right to education on the list of fundamental rights guaranteed by the government to citizens of India even now, it is not merely justiciability that would be ensured (it is already justiciable since 1993, vide the Supreme Court judgement in the Unnikrishnan case), but it would also indicate a 'political will' in favour of mass education. A Parliament that amends the Constitution by a two thirds majority to make it a fundamental right, will also be bound to allocate funds and the means to ensure that such a right is translated into achievement.

**A**s pointed out, while the importance of the law is obvious, what is equally important is that it have the firm commitment of the nation behind it.

The fate of the 83rd Constitution Amendment Bill still hangs in the balance. But there is no doubt that there can be no better evidence of a political will in favour of elementary education for the masses than for education to be guaranteed as a fundamental right of every child – to start with.

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# Rethinking revolution in Bihar

BELA BHATIA

BIHAR has the lowest literacy rates in the country. In the post-independence period, Bihar's relative performance has registered a decline. After 1961, educational levels in the state slid even lower than states known to be poor performers like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Widespread illiteracy, combined with the highest poverty levels in the country, acute social and economic inequalities and inefficient governance, earned for Bihar the reputation of being an 'area of darkness.'

However, many political movements were born in the abyss of these dark depths—the Naxalite movement was one of them. Kindled by the Naxalbari uprising in neighbouring West Bengal, the first seeds of the movement were sown in 1967. It has been active in Bihar ever since. Guided by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, this revolutionary movement has considerable support among the poor, especially agricul-

tural labourers, and has earned itself the reputation of being a *garibo ki party* (party of the poor).

In this note, I wish to understand the situation of primary education in central Bihar, the extent to which a revolutionary movement such as the Naxalite movement has engaged itself with the issue of basic education, and its impact—positive or negative—on the status of primary education. My observations are based on field work in 33 villages of two districts, Bhojpur and Jehanabad, in 1995-96. These districts have been traditional strongholds of the movement. I will refer to the Naxalite groups which have considerable influence in these two districts, CPI(ML) Liberation and CPI(ML) Party Unity.

In most of the study villages I found that for most caste groups government schools were located within a reasonable distance. In some villages primary schools (standards 1-5) were separate, in many others they

were part of the middle school (standards 6-8). School buildings and classrooms were often unfit for human use: filthy premises, dilapidated furniture, assorted clutter, broken windows, leaking roofs, uneven floors and inadequate lighting were common. In only a few schools were classes held regularly. While the phenomenon of absentee teachers was less frequent than expected, few teachers seemed to be motivated and interested in what they were doing.

**M**oreover, in many villages obvious education-related irregularities had largely gone unchecked. This is amply demonstrated in the following case study. Significantly, both CPI(ML) Liberation and CPI(ML) Party Unity have a presence in this village.

Patariya, a village in the Sahar block of Bhojpur district, has private as well as government schools. The private schools function well. The teachers are highly motivated, and work long hours for a salary as low as Rs 175 a month in the hope that after a few years their school would be 'recognized' by the government. This would entitle them to government salaries.

Consequently, it was quite paradoxical to find a 'ghost' government school in the village. The three-room school building constructed the previous year had been left incomplete without a roof and in the following monsoon was completely ruined. The iron doors and windows had rusted, weeds grew in the classrooms and the school had become a shelter for stray goats who had settled among the weeds and the debris. A large open space in front of the school lay waste.

The teachers of this ghost school continued to draw salaries. The local activists bemoaned this state of affairs, but did not seem to think that the

situation called for any remedial action by them.

**P**riate schools, which charge a small fee, have proliferated in most of these villages and run parallel to the government schooling system. By and large they are considered to be qualitatively better. Neither new nor unique to the central Bihar villages, this phenomenon is a response to the near total collapse of the state educational facilities. Educated unemployed youth have tried to fill the gap. What is new about this phenomenon in the Naxalite areas is that as a result of the class struggle greater caste polarisation has taken place. The tension in these villages is often palpable. An atmosphere of mutual suspicion and fear exists. And it is this fear which is at the base of the creation of private schools on caste lines, often one or more in each *tola* (hamlet), depending on its caste configuration. The emergence of private schools on caste lines, however, cannot be greeted with much enthusiasm, as it reinforces caste distinctions and prejudices.

Even a cursory look at the enrolment and attendance register at many schools revealed that an overwhelming majority of the children of the poor do not go to school. While this observation applies to most communities listed under the categories of 'lower backward castes' and 'scheduled castes', it was especially true of particular social groups like the Musahars (also known as Bhuiyas).

As their name suggests, the Musahars (rat-eaters) live on the margins of subsistence. They are landless and survive as agricultural labourers; literacy in this community is less than one per cent. In many villages of central Bihar a separate school has been constructed in or near the Musahar tola, but the building is used for purposes other than schooling. This was

the case in the 'Bhutoli' (as the tola of the Bhuiyas is known) in village Chatiana of Jehanabad district and village Baruhi of Bhojpur district.

When I visited the school in Chatiana, I saw only three boys standing in one corner of the classroom (their posture suggested punishment), while the teacher, who sat cross-legged on the floor with a stick clutched in one hand, dozed. The classroom was empty, there was no furniture except for the teacher's cycle. Many children of school-going age were roaming about in the vicinity of the tola. The parents, most of whom were members of the Mazdoor Kisan Sangrami Parishad (MKSP), a mass front of CPI(ML) Party Unity, showed no interest whatsoever in schooling.

The scene at Baruhi was somewhat similar. The primary school, a small neat building, was located in the middle of the tola near some plum trees. When I visited the school in the morning, it was deserted except for the teacher, a middle-aged man who sat idly on the verandah. The only other presence was that of a little monkey, who was munching plums.

**A**ccording to the teachers, while the number of girls attending school had increased there was no significant improvement in the enrolment of children from the lower castes and classes. As one teacher remarked, 'Only the upwardly mobile classes take interest in education and send their boys and girls to school; they see a link between progress and education. Among the scheduled castes, those who do send their children to school, stop after the 7th or 8th standard.' Indeed, during my field work, the absence of educated youth among the scheduled castes was striking. Within this category, education levels were considerably higher among the Chamars than the Musahars.



I spoke to many parents, especially those who did not send their children to school. Often, parents were unaware of the number of schools in their village. An attitude of disinterest, hopelessness or apathy was apparent.

In the Naxalite areas, therefore, the state of the schools and the extent of people's utilization of the system is the same or even worse than in other areas. An overwhelming majority of the children of the poor, who constitute the mass base of the Naxalite movement, do not go to school. With few exceptions, the attitude of parents who are members of a revolutionary movement is no different from those of poor parents elsewhere.

**A**side from the usual reasons why schooling is not widespread (e.g., absence of school in the village, non-functional building, absconding teachers), the ongoing political strife in central Bihar often makes schools inaccessible on a temporary or permanent basis. The following reasons contribute to this inaccessibility.

1. Police camps: Police camps dot the villages where the Naxalite movement is strong. Some of them are temporary pickets, others more permanent. Since government schools are public property, and because the police need a *pucca* structure, a part or the entire building of the village school is occupied by them. The impact on education is predictably disastrous. The mere presence of the police force impedes the learning process and has a serious psychological effect on children. It is particularly damaging to the education of girls, who easily drop out as a result (especially at the middle and high school stages). In villages where schools are totally occupied and no alternative arrangements are made, education for all children comes to a halt. While the upper

classes are able to make alternative arrangements, especially for the boys, children of the lower classes do not have that opportunity.

2. Desertion of schools: In villages where political struggle is rife and the atmosphere heavy with tension, the school is often the first institution that is affected. Under the circumstances, the location of the school determines who continues to attend and who drops out. More often than not, government schools are located in or close to the upper caste hamlets. In such a situation, the parents of the opposing castes prefer that their children go to another school. These arrangements often start as temporary ones, but in course of time become permanent.

For example, in Gorpa village (Bhojpur district), the children of the Yadav tola do not attend the primary school located in the Bhumihar locality of the same village, but go to the government school in neighbouring Diliya village. This has been the case since the early 1970s, when acute tension between the Bhumihars and the Yadavs resulted in a string of murders and incarcerations.

3. Schools as refuge for the displaced: Political strife has other consequences. A recent example is the situation of more than 100 dalit families displaced from three tolas of Belaur village in 1995 following an armed attack by the Ranbeer Sena, a private army of the upper caste Bhumihar landlords. The families, most of whom were members or supporters of the CPI(M) Liberation, were forced to take refuge in Chakardah, a dalit tola of the same village. Turned homeless overnight, these families found support in the Chakardah families who allowed the use of the primary school building located in their tola. The displaced people built their own shelters soon enough, but the school was an immense help during the monsoon and winter months of 1995 and 1996,

especially for little infants, children and the old. Even though classes continued during this period, some disruption of education could not be avoided.

4. Targeting of Teachers: Teachers, because of their own caste and class, often get embroiled in local politics or become victims in the course of the ongoing battle between two classes. During my field work, there were many instances where teachers were targeted. The following story told by Nandji Yadav and corroborated by Shivji Singh, both teachers in the middle school at Diliya, illustrates the point. The events took place in Charpokhri block (Bhojpur district); the first one seems to have occurred around 3 February 1996.

I reached Charpokhri on a Saturday. There was a big crowd in the bazaar, and at the police *thana*. Curious, I inquired from a shopkeeper. 'Don't you know?' he exclaimed, 'a master (teacher) was found in a ditch. An attempt was made to strangle him with a rope, but it is his good fate that he survived.' The victim was of Bhumihar caste and taught in Bagar village.

On the night of 7 February, a group of 15 armed men (it is said that they were from the same village and members of the Ranbeer Sena) attacked and shot dead a group of *halwahas* (agricultural labourers hired on an yearly contractual basis) of Chandi village as they sat around a fire in the *khaliyan* (threshing floor), guarding the harvest. All four victims were dalits.

There was great tension in the area. People stopped using that road. On 10 February, a group of villagers accosted, kidnapped and murdered a Bhumihar teacher from Bagar village who was on his way to Betadi where he taught at the primary school. He was last seen some distance from the

school on his cycle. While this incident was still being discussed, we heard of another incident in Katrahi village, where a teacher, also a Bhumihar, was kidnapped. The dead bodies of the two teachers were recovered by the police after a couple of days. It was clear that they were murdered by the IPF (Indian People's Front, a former front organization of the CPI-ML Liberation).

Both incidents, in quick succession, are part of an ongoing conflict between the CPI(ML) Liberation and the Ranbeer Sena. The 3 February incident could have been in retaliation to the murder of one Ram Lal Ram, father of a CPI(ML) cadre, on 24 January in Ekwari village (Sahar block). According to eyewitness sources, this murder was the work of members of the Ranbeer Sena.

**F**or several weeks after these incidents, an atmosphere of acute tension and fear prevailed in the region. Since the teachers targeted were of Bhumihar caste, it was assumed that the CPI(ML) Liberation was behind the killings. Consequently, fearing reprisals, the dalit children stopped going to school. Even the teachers, especially of Bhumihar and scheduled castes, stopped attending school. I was informed that all schools, which had teachers who were either Bhumihar or from a scheduled caste, were closed. Similarly, schools in villages known to be under the dominant influence of one of these two castes also shut down as teachers from other castes did not dare to enter these villages. According to the teachers interviewed on 28 February 1996, schools in the villages of: Chandi, Betadi, Bhaluana, Bajjain, Sohri, Machiav, Mathurapur and Bagar (all within a radius of 4 km of Chandi) were closed at the time as teachers – many of them Bhumihars – were too scared to attend school.

Besides targeting teachers, schools too have come under direct attack. In the early 1970s when the movement was at its peak, part of the high school at Ekwari village was burnt down by CPI(ML) Liberation cadres, which included Jagdish Mahato, one of the founders of the Naxalite movement in Bhojpur, and himself a teacher.<sup>1</sup>

**A**s mentioned earlier, the Naxalite movement has waged a class struggle in the plains of central Bihar for nearly three decades. The movement has succeeded in restoring confidence among the dalits of the region, drawing attention to their plight, demanding that they be treated with basic human dignity. Among the principal achievements of the movement are an increase in agricultural wages, the end to extreme forms of social oppression – such as the sexual exploitation of dalit women – and, in many villages, the confiscation and distribution of ceiling surplus land as well as of *gairmajurwa* (village common) land under the illegal occupation of the upper classes.

But have the Naxalites made any intervention in the field of education, especially basic education? I found negligible evidence of direct intervention in the study villages, whether in the form of improving the government schooling system, struggling for its equitable access, or ensuring better

1. This was reported to me by Satya master, a retired teacher of Bhumihar caste (of Gulzarpur village) who had taught Jagdish Mahato. According to him, Jagdish was angry because his application for a job as Science teacher in the school had been rejected. What Satya master did not mention to me is another rumour, that Jagdish (a very bright student) was not selected by the Bhumihar lobby which dominated the school because he was a Kurmi. This rumour is itself quite plausible. Education of the lower castes was, and to an extent still is, disliked and often discouraged by the upper castes who think of education as their prerogative.

utilization. There was some interest in creating a parallel schooling system, but the problems in this approach were apparent.

In Jehanabad I visited a school run by the MKSP, and heard about similar efforts by the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Gaya district. (While there was no evidence of a similar effort on the part of CPI(ML) Liberation in the study villages, it is possible that they have taken similar initiatives elsewhere.) As an activist of Party Unity mentioned, however, such efforts were limited for lack of human and material resources. Moreover, the nature of the movement imposed important restrictions. For example, MCC reportedly closed the school even before it was properly opened because of the massive police force which descended on the school in the hope of catching some 'wanted extremists'.

**D**espite these difficulties, one is left with the feeling that Naxalite organizations could have been more creative and achieved far more than they have in their nearly thirty years of activity in the area. While the movement's resilience is impressive, some questions still remain. Not only is there widespread illiteracy among the masses, but it persists even in families whose children would be third generation Naxalites. A movement which aims to struggle against the roots of poverty and inequality must face the fact that literacy plays a crucial role in the emancipation of the masses, and in building their individual capabilities and collective strength.

What is significant is that in Bihar, primary education has not ranked high on the agenda of either the mainstream or left parliamentary parties, or of the revolutionary parties. As a result, the dominance of the privi-

leged castes and classes over educational institutions has gone unchallenged. The political and social advancement of the backward castes that has taken place in the state in recent years is also reflected in a changed attitude of these castes towards the education of both boys and girls. It is only the lower backward castes as well as the dalits who are deprived of this fundamental human and democratic right.

The neglect of education by the Naxalite movement in central Bihar contrasts with the emphasis on education by the communist movements in many other countries or even in other states of the country such as Kerala. Literacy campaigns, for instance, have played a key role in popular mobilization in Latin America. The promotion of mass literacy is also among the important achievements of communist countries such as China and Cuba. In this respect, the teachings and personal example of Bhim Rao Ambedkar also stand out. His message to the dalits should not be forgotten: *shikshit bano, sangathit raho, aur sangharsh karo* (study, organize and resist).

It would seem that while the Naxalites have achieved some success in politically educating the masses and raising their political 'consciousness', they have not recognized the worth of formal education as an important tool and component of class struggle. Nor do they recognize that educated masses could lead to a more informed struggle, help the participation of masses as equals and make them more capable to lead the struggle. Instead, education is regarded as reform rather than revolution. This calls for rethinking about what constitutes a revolution. Does revolution involve only changing the equations of power at the state level, or does it also involve the need to empower people as persons?

## Teachers' associations

P. G. VIJAYA SHERRY CHAND

RECENT political trends in India have endorsed economic liberalization and globalization. The implications of this endorsement for education have been discussed at length in the media. As far as basic education is concerned, the argument is that public investment in this sector needs to be augmented since it yields high social returns and that a certain mass threshold of basic education (human capital) is a prerequisite for sustaining economic development.

In other words, even the non-socialist perspectives underlying these arguments call for a strengthening of state-financed and managed mass basic schooling. In recent times, a major form that such a strengthening has taken is direct and targeted central assistance (drawing on local or external finances) to districts which are educationally backward – areas with low enrolments, high enrolment disparities between boys and girls, and poor performance of the educational system as reflected in high levels of elimination from the schooling system.

These directions in the reform of mass schooling have been accompanied by debate and discussion among various stakeholders (administrators, academics, donor institutions, independent citizens) on what needs to be done and how. The debate has touched not just on educational performance but on broader issues like community control over basic education, child labour and the rights of disabled

children. One stakeholder group which seems to be muted in these academic discussions, however, is the organized voice of teachers.

One of course witnesses sporadic expression of teacher strength, for instance, during the opposition to panchayat control over basic education. But the contribution of a collective expression of teachers to academic debate has been negligible. Whatever little is being done – for instance, the setting up of networks of women primary school teachers through the efforts of the All India Primary Teachers' Federation (AIPTF), the role of teachers' associations in the implementation of the Joyful Learning programme in Uttar Pradesh, or the efforts of the innovative teachers of the Gujarat State Primary Teachers' Federation (GSPTF) – is not well known, and had little influence on the policy reform debate.

**T**he inability of teachers to engage constructively in the ongoing policy and academic debate is surprising, considering that teachers constitute the most important input into the educational system – we have a huge teaching force of about 3 million elementary school teachers in the country, whose salaries account for a substantial part (about 95 per cent) of the recurring budgets. Two broad explanations are possible. Either other stakeholders do not have confidence in the collective ability or capacity of teachers to contribute meaningfully to the debate; or teachers themselves do not have the confidence to visualize or to organize themselves as a significant partner in the debate. Perhaps both explanations are valid.

Teachers are often held responsible for our poor performance on the basic education front. For instance, a recent World Bank report, *Primary Education in India (1997)*, categori-

cally states that 'improving teachers' performance is the most important challenge for primary education in India' (p. 142). The report identifies poor subject mastery (lack of knowledge), poor teaching skills, poor motivation (reflected, for instance, in high absenteeism), poor working conditions and limited career opportunities, and very importantly, low perceived status, as the principal weaknesses of the teaching force. Results of surveys and tests which have been administered to teachers are presented as evidence to support charges of lack of subject mastery and poor teaching skills among a large number of teachers.

**W**hile one may argue that the factors contributing to poor educational performance are much more complex and that there is a lot of diversity within the teaching community, analyses like the above must be taken note of, given that teachers have been the most important input provided by the state, and that in many villages the teacher is indeed the school. The analysis may well lead one to ask whether our teachers are competent to teach, and whether they are motivated enough to take their teaching seriously. Observations similar to those made in the report are often heard during discussions with educational administrators who, on the basis of their 'experience', can cite many examples of teachers being unable to add up fractions or being confused about the decimal system.

There is no doubt that these observations may hold true for a sizeable number of teachers. The problem arises when these perceptions are extended to the entire teacher population: the possibility that just as with any other population, teachers could also include some positive 'outliers' (outstanding people who can serve as

exemplars) tends to be underplayed; second, the entire teacher population is conceptualized as a class with certain deficits (deficiencies which are no doubt valid for the majority) and thus in need of external training inputs.

The consequence of such characterization is our inability to build on the strengths that do exist within the teacher community, even if only in a small part of it. An extension of this consequence is what was mentioned earlier: a lack of confidence in the ability of teachers to contribute meaningfully to policy reform debate. The implication of this situation is that the synergy that should be possible as a result of the involvement of all the major stakeholders is lost. The problems facing the basic education sector are too enormous for us to ignore the value of a significant role for teachers in the design and implementation of partnerships.

**W**e now turn to the question of whether or not teachers visualize themselves as a significant stakeholder group, competent enough as a collective, to contribute to the discussion on academic and policy debate. Historically, the state has been responsible for public basic education, and teachers have been considered employees of the state. Even in states where *zilla panchayats*, *nagar panchayats* or municipal corporations appoint primary school teachers, the state finances teacher salaries, either fully or almost fully. In addition, the linkages with the Directorate or Department of Primary Education – for instance, in matters of approval of teacher transfers, educational inspection – are quite strong. In effect, *de facto*, most teachers would consider themselves state employees, or in more general terms, 'workers' at the bottom rung of the educational bureaucracy.

The low status of the primary teacher in this hierarchy – which as a result of the large numbers of teachers has a broad base and a very narrow ‘management’ at the top – is best illustrated by the conceptualization of the teacher as a ‘meek dictator’ (Kumar, 1990), all-powerful within the classroom among his students, but powerless outside it. This, however, does not prevent them from having to accept almost all the blame for overall poor educational performance. As some teachers point out, ‘unlike the case of companies, it is almost impossible to hear about the top management like the Education Directors taking the blame for poor educational performance.’

**A**s workers, teachers may thus be expected to organize themselves into associations for purposes of protecting their rights and benefits. At the same time, the nature of the work performed, education, is still seen as a moral activity. This is best illustrated by the descriptions of the profession as a ‘noble’ one, or of teaching as a ‘sacred’ activity aimed at character and nation building. In addition, teachers work in widely dispersed locations, one teacher or a small group of teachers being responsible for the school. This aspect of the teacher’s work is related more to issues of professional development. Teachers’ associations have been trying to address both aspects, teaching as labour and teaching as mission, of teachers’ work, but perhaps have not had much success in achieving a reasonable balance.

The Gujarat State Primary Teachers’ Federation (GSPTF)<sup>1</sup> is an illustration of this dilemma. The GSPTF has been the sole recognized representative of Gujarat’s teachers since

1975, though it had been in existence as an informal body since January 1936. Its early history (pre-independence and up to the reorganization of the erstwhile Bombay state) is not so well recorded, except that there is some evidence of participation in the freedom struggle and that leaders like Lilavati Munshi and Lady Vidyagouri Nilkanth played organizing roles as presidents of the general body in the early 1940s.

**T**he GSPTF was approved by the state’s education and labour departments as a body which could affiliate district-level associations of teachers to itself, and thus in practice represent the teachers of the state. Over the last two decades or so, it has made a string of successful interventions on behalf of teachers regarding their rights and service conditions. Instances include fixation of pay, transfer norms, scales of pay in accordance with completion of specified blocks of years. It has also intervened on behalf of individual teachers when cases of discrimination or injustice have been brought before it.

Thus, as a state-recognized federation of teachers’ groups, the GSPTF has limited its major activities to service-related issues. It has not played a significant political role – unlike perhaps in the very different pre-independence scenario – though its leaders have been identified with different political parties over the years; nor has it been able to undertake significant and sustained initiatives for the professional development of teachers. Despite its large size, it has not had the visibility and influence that associations of teachers at higher levels in education, for instance, college teachers, have had.

possibilities, of teacher collectives. This federation is an association of 19 district-level groups, which together account for more than 1,75,000 teachers.

Teachers in higher education, as an organized collective, may have contributed positively to the improvement of higher education, but one comes across more examples of how teachers’ groups may have acted as impediments to educational reform – whether it is on issues of institutional autonomy, standards applicable to teachers themselves, or examination reform. Comparable examples where teachers in basic education have successfully opposed reform are difficult to come by. The most publicised instance of nation-wide organized opposition is the agitation launched in various states and at the national level through the AIPTEF, against certain aspects of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments which sought to introduce the control of local panchayats (village or nagar) over teachers. A brief discussion of this issue will highlight some of the contentious perspectives that characterize how teachers conceptualize themselves in relation to attempts to reform basic education.

**T**he National Programme of Action for Education revised by the Government of India in 1992 focused on decentralization as an important policy thrust. This fitted in with the renewed interest in the panchayat system as a decentralized structure for integrating development initiatives, especially given the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution. Section 243G (11th Schedule) of the Constitution of India (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 includes, among other items, primary education. To facilitate educational administration in the light of these amendments, a Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) committee provided a blueprint for the states’ consideration when they evolved their own panchayat acts. This included an organizational

1. This article will use the case of the Gujarat State Primary Teachers’ Federation to illustrate various aspects of the functioning, or the

structure composed of various committees, funding mechanisms, and organizational support and training requirements for the committees.

**A**t the village level, an education committee was considered a crucial management body. The composition of the committee was specified: the number of members had to be not less than seven and not more than 15; apart from the chairman or panchayat member and the headmaster of the primary school, a representative of the scheduled castes and tribes, a parent and an *anganwadi* worker were to be included. The committee was expected to have the power to check attendance registers and report on, among other things, regularity of students, teachers' attendance, and school functioning. It could also undertake any construction and repair work entrusted to it.

The logic of this approach was based on an understanding of the role that village communities could play in controlling factors affecting their immediate lives, like basic education. The assumption was that the closer the monitoring agency to the point of delivery of a service, the greater the effectiveness of that service. However, from the perspective of the teachers, the issue became one of supervision by, and accountability to, a heterogeneous body which might not have the standing or competence to supervise teachers.<sup>2</sup>

Most states have adopted a cautious approach to this issue, notwithstanding the village level committees set up in various states under the

2. The teachers' resistance to village level education committees (VEC) may be linked to their fears that the committees may become a part of the political machinations of the village community, thereby hampering the effective functioning of the school, the chances of teachers becoming pawns in such games and a belief that their own inputs to a VEC will be limited, considering the marginal status accorded to school teachers. See Vasavi et al. (1997).

District Primary Education Programme whose mandate stresses more the monitoring of the educational performance of the village than the supervision of teachers.

In summary, though their immediate reactions have been negative to community control over basic education at the grassroots, teachers' associations still have to come to terms with this issue and related concerns like accountability and sharing responsibility with local communities for improving educational performance. In more general terms, there are educational issues like these on which teachers' associations need to articulate constructive and sound positions. Such a development is possible only if teachers' associations themselves move towards expanding their research and academic capabilities and capacities.

**B**ecoming stronger professionally and academically is easier said than done. Most associations in the country depend on meagre financial contributions from their members and are in no position to independently chart out programmes which would require heavy financial commitments. But it is not that our associations have not attempted to increase their professional competence. Ironically, however, it is the international associations of teachers who have attempted to contribute to the academic development of our associations. The Study Circle Project is one instance, though a limited one, through which teachers themselves have tried to prepare their own materials and have set up decentralized discussion platforms.

This project, implemented in some states through the state associations affiliated to the AIPTE, may be traced to the latter's linkages with international teachers' associations. The AIPTE is one of the four Indian

national associations affiliated to Education International (EI), which represents about 2.3 crore teachers of 148 countries and territories. EI itself is the result of an amalgamation, in 1993, of the International Federation of Free Teacher Unions and the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession, which had supported local initiatives in India. It is through such connections, and with specific financial support from the Swedish Teachers' Association, that the Study Circle Project was initiated by the GSPTF through the AIPTE.

**T**he impact of this project, though limited, is perceived to be positive by the teacher leaders and participating teachers. But the issue of concern is that similar partnerships and projects have not resulted through collaboration with local academic and other support institutions. If our various schools of education and related research organizations were to treat the activity of enabling teachers' organizations to build up their capabilities as an important intervention, the effectiveness of the community-state-teacher triangle, which ultimately should work coherently for improving educational performance, can be ensured.

Where do teachers' associations begin? From the competence and proven expertise that exists within. As noted earlier, it is no doubt true that there are any number of teachers who 'often have little understanding of the material they teach, possess few teaching skills, and are poorly motivated...' (World Bank 1997: 142), but the training of teachers by those who may not have excelled in education and the exhortation of teachers by those who often do not understand the spirit in which many outstanding teachers try to achieve their goals, will not solve the problem. This is where teachers' associations can play a role

by enabling leadership from within, which is based on professional competence, to guide the process of teacher development.

**T**he argument for a greater role for the outstanding teachers in building up the capabilities of the wider teaching community rests on two assumptions: many individual teachers, on their own, have evolved answers to problems posed by their specific socio-economic and classroom situations; second, these answers are relevant to other teachers, since they take into account the actual contextual constraints most teachers face.

In an attempt initiated about four years ago, the GSPTF and the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, identified about 200 teachers who, through a variety of pedagogical, social and resource-mobilization innovations initiated on their own many years ago, had achieved their goals of universal basic education, long before Education For All became a national concern. Many of them had not publicised their work, the most prominent aspect of which was a focus on enrolment and retaining children in school. Many of their experiments may appear simple and unsophisticated, but they were effective in the teachers' contexts. A few examples follow.

Thakarshi Kunbar in the late 1960s tracked children from the time they completed one year of age to the time when they were ready for school through birthday greetings sent to the parents. The cards had a simple message: the number of years left before the child entered school. Thus pressure was built up for enrolment. Bhanumati Upadhyaya, in the mid-1970s, used the *rakshabandhan* festival to achieve a breakthrough in the enrolment of girls. After tying *rakhis* to the males of the community, the gift she requested in return was their girls

—a culturally symbolic request which could not be refused. Ajitsingh Solanki has a portfolio of methods for raising funds for his village school: this includes, among other things, a donor database, religious *katha* programmes, youth clubs for *shramdhan*. Raman Soni uses a system of calling out two-digit Gujarati numbers which follows the English system of tens followed by units; he found that many of his class 1 and 2 children reversed the digits while writing out the numbers because the spoken form put the unit digit first. Such experiments, or at least the heuristics that underpin the teachers' thinking processes, may perhaps be of interest even today to teachers working in difficult geographical pockets.

**A** second important aspect of the work of such teachers is a focus on building support for schooling in the community and improving the infrastructure facilities in their schools. This assumes relevance in the context of what has been said above about decentralized management of primary education through village-level participation. In summary, the outstanding teachers combined within themselves, at various points of time, different roles — such as social worker or community organizer, entrepreneur, classroom researcher, parent. Such teachers have the potential to provide an ability-based leadership that peer-driven approaches to teacher development need.

Facilitating the involvement of outstanding teachers in teacher-driven or peer networks of development is by itself not sufficient. Teachers' associations have to take a hard and professional look at the issue of standards that would apply to their own members. Most states have moved towards the central guidelines of 12 years of schooling prior to a two-year teacher

pre-service training programme. To an extent, this by itself will improve academic standards of the teaching community.

**B**ut associations can be more proactive by first accepting that the standard of the majority leaves much to be desired and then instituting creative mechanisms that would give teachers the opportunity to test themselves every four or five years. This can then be linked to remedial action for those who need it. This kind of voluntary self-imposition of certain minimum standards would convey far more effectively, and in a manner acceptable to teachers, the intention of the associations to abide by certain professional and academic standards.

A third major area of strategic importance is to develop positions on crucial educational issues — academic, professional or managerial — through empirical research. Developing research capabilities for this purpose, on their own or through partnerships with sympathetic academic institutions, should be an important and urgent task for teachers' associations. The issues of decentralization, community control and teacher accountability were mentioned earlier. Some examples of other issues that are becoming important include reform of poorly performing schools, policies on private management of schools, the language policy of the state (especially given the recent demand for English medium instruction in many areas and the consequent mushrooming of unaided schools), textbook policies, the policy of recruiting 'barefoot' teachers adopted by some states, incentives to motivate children to enrol and remain in school.

Another set of issues has to do with boundary maintenance, like the role of teachers' associations vis-à-vis political organizations. This kind of

preparation would make the limited participation of teachers' association leaders on state initiated platforms (for instance, the role of the GSPTF's president in the Minimum Levels of Learning Committee and the Text-book Board in Gujarat) more effective and open up new avenues of participation, like evaluation of recent innovative programmes and collaborating in large-scale teacher development efforts.

We have attempted an answer as to why the collective voice of teachers is unable to make itself heard constructively in recent debates on policy matters relating to basic education. Teachers have been seen as incapable of contributing meaningfully to these debates and at the same time teacher collectives have not had the confidence to act as a significant partner in the debates. Teachers' associations have not been able to reconcile their protective role in relation to rights and welfare of teachers on the one hand, and the professional mission of teaching seen as sacred, on the other. An almost exclusive emphasis on the former has not permitted them to develop a professional aura of capability which compels public recognition. This is best achieved by building on the capabilities of outstanding teachers, by generating processes of self-regulation to maintain internal standards and, by developing research capabilities in order to take a clear stands on major policy issues.

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## A fundamental right

JANDHYALA B. G. TILAK

IN a historic judgement the Supreme Court of India in July 1992, declared that education is a fundamental right and that 'the state is under a constitutional mandate to provide educational institutions at all levels for the benefit of citizens.' Immediate reactions to the judgement focused on higher professional education, as that was the scope of the original petition.<sup>1</sup>

\* This article partly draws from the author's presentation made in the Convention on Education as a Fundamental Right, organized by the University of Delhi, as a part of the golden jubilee celebrations of the Central Institute of Education (18 December 1997). The views expressed here are those of the author and should not necessarily be attributed to the organization that he is associated with.

1. For example, the University Grants Commission and the Association of Indian Universities have jointly sponsored a colloquium and several private professional colleges organized debates on this issue. See among many, AIU (1992) and UGC (1992).



The uproar against the judgement declaring education, including higher professional education, as a fundamental right, later required the Supreme Court to modify its judgement (1993) so as to confine the scope to elementary education: 'The citizens of the country have a fundamental right to education... every child/citizen of this country has a right to free education until he completes the age of 14 years...'

**S**ince Article 45 of the Constitution of India (which states that 'the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years'), and other provisions in the Constitution could not compel the government to provide for universal elementary education even after 50 years of independence, the judgements of the Supreme Court assume utmost significance.

The judgements also assume importance, as we have not been sincere to the UN/UNESCO/ILO declarations on human rights and the rights of children, which India has ratified. The judgement of the Supreme Court is the culmination of a process in which the efforts of the Union government, particularly in constituting the Muhi Ram Saikia (1997) Committee to consider the implications of making elementary education a fundamental right and the subsequent bill, have to be seen.

The Saikia Committee recommended an amendment to the Constitution making the right to free elementary education up to 14 years of age, a fundamental right. The provision of free elementary education, according to the committee, includes exemption from tuition fee, provision of free textbooks for all primary

school children and girls up to upper primary level, and provision of essential stationery to all children in primary classes. While the committee recommended that the mid-day meal programme be continued, provision of other incentives such as free school uniforms, cash incentives, scholarships and so on, could be left to the discretion of the states

subject to 'economic capacities and priorities' of the respective state governments.

The committee has recommended the provision of minimum infrastructure and teachers to all schools as envisaged under the Operation Blackboard Programme. It has obliquely referred to quality by mentioning teacher training, quality textbooks and minimum levels of learning.

**H**owever, the committee did not suggest central legislation making elementary education 'compulsory'; on the other hand, states could either amend existing laws or enact fresh legislation in this regard. But the committee did suggest what state legislation should provide for. *Inter alia*, it should include making education compulsory—governments should be required to provide accessible schooling facilities to all, and parents should treat it as their fundamental duty to send their children to schools.

The proposed amendment to the Constitution has to be seen in this background. Fortunately, as the bill for the constitutional amendment was introduced in the Rajya Sabha and not in the Lok Sabha, it did not elapse with the dissolution of the 11th Lok Sabha. But some important questions remain. Why is the amendment necessary?

TABLE 1

	Status of Compulsory Education in the World		
	Number of countries where compulsion exists	does not exist	no information
Africa	44	8	—
North America	23	2	—
South America	12	—	—
Asia	34	8	8
Europe	43	—	1
Oceania	5	5	—
Total	161	23	9

Source: *World Education Report, 1995* (Paris: Unesco).

There are those who feel that the existing provisions of the Constitution (e.g., Articles 39, 41, 45, 46) take care of what is intended in the amendment. But the amendment needs to be welcomed for a variety of reasons: First, even if it does not substantially add to the existing provisions, the amendment is a reiteration by the state of its commitment to universal elementary education. Hopefully, it will induce the state and the people to make a special effort towards reaching this goal. Even symbolically, it is important in a socio-political system of our kind.

**S**Second, compulsory school education has been a part and parcel of the civilized world. In as many as 161 out of 193 countries on which information is available, there is some degree of compulsion in school education (Table 1). There are few exceptions. Only 23 countries have no legislation making education compulsory, among which nine are in Africa<sup>2</sup> and nine in Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Third, the amendment for making education compulsory is also

2. Botswana, Gambia, Kenya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Swaziland and Uganda.

3. Bahrain, Bhutan, Lebanon, Maldives, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

important as existing provisions of the Constitution do not ensure either free, compulsory or universal elementary education. In fact, the constitutional provisions are vague and ambiguous regarding the concept of education. As Article 45 refers to education, and not formal schooling, all sorts of education including non-formal, informal, and literacy programmes were sanctified as though equivalent to formal education.

**A**rticle 45 does not refer either to the duration of education or the lower limit of the age-group of the child to be covered. Thus, there has been a tendency to restrict universal education to four or five years (if not a few months of literacy activities) or 2-3

years of non-formal education and to interpret the age-group as the state finds convenient.

**T**hough some state legislatures have compulsory education acts on the statute books, it is not clear how many states enforce them. While there are at least 19 states in which acts making education compulsory exist (including Goa where an act was passed in 1995-96),<sup>4</sup> according to the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, in as many as 18 states and union territories of the Indian union 'compulsion is not in force' (Table 2). Further, many of the acts are known as education or primary education acts; only a few are known as elementary education or compulsory education acts. Some refer to the age-group 6-11; others to 6-14.

Fourth, the existing legislations only indicate that the state government has the power to make education compulsory in any designated area of the state; they do not indicate exactly whether any area or the whole state has been designated and whether compulsion is actually enforced. In practice, education of children in India has neither been viewed as a right nor as a duty. Many existing acts have been found to be of no use. Hence the need for a central legislation in the form of a comprehensive amendment to the Constitution.

Fifth, in the absence of any meaningful legislation, it is also the experience that voluntarism did not work during the last 50

years – either on the part of the government or on the part of the people. A proper national legislation may make it truly compulsory in spirit and effect.

Sixth, a national comprehensive legislation is also important to make education a fundamental right, as the Supreme Court judgment might be reinterpreted or reviewed in not necessarily a desirable way.

**T**here are some who strongly argue against the need for such a legislation. They claim that (a) free compulsory education is expensive, and government does not have resources to provide for it; (b) it is difficult to enforce; (c) compulsion causes hardships to the poor; and (d) there is no justification to send children to poor quality schools. These are not new arguments. They are exactly the same as the ones made in the Imperial Legislative Assembly in India, when Gopal Krishna Gokhale proposed a resolution in favour of free compulsory education about a hundred years ago. As these arguments are being vigorously articulated, we may briefly examine them.

Education is, no doubt, expensive; but the alternative is more expensive to the society in the long run. The loss in terms of social welfare (including economic growth, income distribution and physical quality of life) due to under-investment in education would be much higher than the expenditure that the society has to incur to provide good quality (elementary) education to all.<sup>5</sup> Further, substantial

4. They are: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Delhi (*DPEP Calling*, June 1997).

5. For example, Birdsall et al. (1993) estimated that Pakistan had foregone a 25% increase in

TABLE 2

Compulsory Education in India

States where compulsory education is (said to be) in force		Age-Group
Andhra Pradesh		6-11
Arunachal Pradesh		-14
Assam		6-14
Bihar		n.a.
Gujarat		6-14
Haryana		6-14
Karnataka		6-14
Kerala		5-14
Madhya Pradesh		6-11
Punjab		6-11
Tamil Nadu		6-14
West Bengal		n.a.
Andaman and Nicobar Isles		6-11
Daman and Diu		5-14
States where compulsion is not in force		
Goa	Rajasthan	
Himachal Pradesh	Sikkim	
Jammu & Kashmir	Tripura	
Maharashtra	Uttar Pradesh	
Manipur	Chandigarh	
Meghalaya	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	
Mizoram	Delhi	
Nagaland	Lakshadweep	
Orissa	Pondicherry	

Source: Selected Information on School Education in India 1994-95 (New Delhi: MHRD, 1996, p. 38).

savings could have been effected in public expenditure on health, sanitation, family welfare, population programmes, community awareness programmes, to mention a few, had we spent adequately on elementary education.

The losses are high, both to the individuals and to society as a whole. Hence there is no option for the government but to find sufficient resources for free compulsory education. Societies that had enacted such legislation in the past (e.g., Japan or the princely provinces of Travancore and Baroda in the 19th and early 20th century) were aware of the cost involved, but realized that it was a better choice than any other measure for the welfare of the people.

**C**ompulsion is difficult to enforce, as the colonial government argued. But there is no choice for the independent government. It could have been difficult for a foreign government which had no mandate from the people; but it should pose little problem for a democratically elected government of the people if it has the will. Proper mechanisms have to be developed for enforcing compulsion. Further, the argument is based on the assumption that there is insufficient demand for elementary education. This is untrue as shown in survey after survey. There is a huge demand for education; the government must respond to it meaningfully, by providing a good learning environment and a conducive atmosphere.

It is also argued that there is no ethical justification to compel the parents to send their children to poor quality schools. The solution lies in

per capita income due to under-investment in primary education during the last three decades. If similar estimates are made for India, one would realize the huge loss society has incurred due to inadequate investments in education.

delivering good quality education, as we define later, not in avoiding legislation providing for compulsory education.

Similarly, compulsions could cause hardship to the poor in the short run as children are withdrawn from the labour market. In the long run though, one expects the poor to be better off with increased levels of schooling. In the interim, the government has to develop a package of financial and other incentives for the poor, so as to reduce not only the students' direct costs of schooling, but also opportunity costs. Such incentives could be selective and targeted. After all, as the abolition of child labour is also an explicitly stated goal of the government, such a financial package would serve a twin purpose. It is necessary to view the financial incentives as important to induce demand for education from poor households, as education improves their well-being, and also because there are immense externalities associated with education that accrue to society.

**T**hus the arguments against free compulsory education are not valid. There are a multitude of individual and social benefits from free and compulsory education, and we must recognize the 'public good' and 'merit good' nature of elementary education.

What should be the desired scope of the new amendment? The new amendment must include at least the following:

a) There should be no ambiguity about what 'free' education means. The Saikia Committee refers to exemption from, not abolition of, tuition fee wherever charged. It does not, however, refer to fees other than tuition.

The definition and scope of free education must be widened. It should include provision of essential teaching learning material – textbooks, sta-

TABLE 3

Duration of Compulsory Cycle of Education	
Duration (Years)	No. of Countries
≤6	50
7-8	38
9-10	54
11-12	19
All	161

Source: World Education Report 1995.

tionary, an integral part of the instruction process – and other incentives such as uniforms, noon meals, and transport, free to all the students in primary and upper primary classes. Leaving the provision of these items to the discretion of the state governments will result in a dilution of the definition leading to inter-state variations in the extent of their provision.<sup>6</sup>

b) The new amendment should clearly define 'education' to include formal schooling, as no other method of learning is believed to be as effective. It should also include a meaningful definition of quality of education, to ensure a reasonable level of quality education for children. Its scope should be well defined as to include provision of necessary physical and human resources, including teachers, infrastructure, and other material.<sup>7</sup>

c) The proposed amendment must define the duration of the cycle of compulsory education and the lower and upper age limits of children to be covered by the acts. To start with, it should be eight years of full time formal schooling. Given the experience of other countries (Table 3), it is

6. Presently, because provision of these incentives is left to the discretion of various state governments, one finds wide variations in the proportion of children benefiting from these incentives. On the whole, they are also received by a small fraction. See, for example, Tilak (1996) for details.

7. Compulsory education laws are found to be effective when good schooling facilities are made accessible to all children. See Colclough with Lewin (1993, p. 262).

desirable to gradually extend the duration of the cycle to the entire schooling span, i.e., 12 years of schooling for the children of the age-group 6-18.

d) The amendment should necessarily make education compulsory. Compulsion should include (i) compulsion on the part of the government to provide accessible adequate schooling facilities of reasonable quality to all children; and (ii) obligation on the part of the parents to send their children to schools. Though exceptions to either category could be worked out, they should be at a minimum.

**T**he Saikia Committee has estimated that an additional Rs 40,000 crore are required to make elementary education available to everyone during the next five year period. This appears to be an underestimate, as the committee took the average recurring expenditure per pupil at Rs 948 (in 1995-96) and the number of children who are outside the school system at 6.6 crore. While the recurring expenditure partially factor in additional expenditure required for improvement in quality, it does not take into account many other necessary inputs currently not provided at all, or provided only to a section of the student population.

In addition, the estimate is exclusive of requirements in terms of capital expenditure, such as additional school buildings/classrooms, furniture and equipment. An expert committee was constituted, as recommended by the Saikia Committee, to examine the financial estimates in detail. According to the expert committee, the additional financial resources required would be of the order of about Rs 95,000 crore for a 10 year period,<sup>8</sup> or about Rs 9.5-10 thousand crore per year.

Compared to the present (1996-97) level of expenditure (plan and non-plan) of about Rs 32,000 crore on education, 50% of which is on elementary education,<sup>9</sup> the additional requirement is indeed sizable. However, it is not beyond reach. If we have to spend on average an additional Rs 10,000 crore every year, it would only be 0.7% of GDP in 1997-98 and would come down to 0.5% by the end of the 10 year period, on the assumption that GDP would increase at a real rate of growth of 5% per annum.

In other words, the additional requirement for the 10 year period is only 0.56% of the 10 year cumulative GDP (in real prices). If GDP increases at a faster rate, i.e., higher than 5% per annum, the proportion additionally required for free compulsory education would be less. If the government sticks to its promise of allocating at least 6% of GDP for education by the end of the Ninth Five Year Plan, the task of additionally allocating Rs 10,000 crore every year for elementary education does not seem to be difficult at all. All this requires, however, a systematic plan for mobilizing additional resource.

**T**he need for mobilization of additional resources is obvious, but the choices available are limited. The governments—union and states—have to finance elementary education out of their own budgetary resources, rather than depending on non-governmental sources such as the students, parents or the community to share the responsibility for financing elementary education. This would be in the true spirit of the constitutional directive of free compulsory education. The Saikia Committee required the central government to meet the additional require-

ments of the states. This would indeed be better and effective. The economically weak state governments should be aided in providing a basic human need—elementary education. In our federal system, however, it would be in the interests of the state governments if they came forward on their own with proposals to invest sizable additional resources on elementary education.

**A**n important and widely prevalent way of financing elementary education is through general taxation. Central and state governments may formulate norms regarding the proportion of their respective budgets to be allocated to education as a whole and to elementary education in particular.<sup>10</sup> The norms should be reasonably high so as to ensure adequate allocation of resources every year. The Saikia Committee recommends that the central and state governments should allocate 50% of budgetary allocations for education to elementary education and to see that they are not diverted to any other sector. A provision of 50% of resources to elementary education (and the remaining 50% to post-elementary education—secondary and higher levels) would also ensure a balanced development of the education system.

The government (central and state) may have to examine and explore the scope for reallocation of resources from unproductive sectors to elementary education. For instance, the union government has stated that resources saved from public sector disinvestment (and the resources generated through such schemes as the voluntary disclosure of income scheme) would be invested in sectors like education and other social infra-

9. *Selected Educational Statistics 1996-97* (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development).

10. Countries like Brazil and Taiwan have norms of this kind.

8. *Indian Express*, 8 November 1997.

structure. A clear weightage may be given to elementary education in this process of reallocation.

From the point of view of public finance, earmarked taxes are not highly favoured. Many argue that as they yield resources for specific and short term needs, measures like an education cess may have to be reintroduced in order to mobilize additional resources for elementary education. This was proposed by the Saikia Committee. Such a cess, if introduced, should be high enough to yield sizable resources for elementary education. The cess is not to be confined to the parents of children going to school. In fact, it should be a general cess levied as a part of another direct/indirect tax, the revenues from which are earmarked for elementary education; and it should not be related to participation of the cess payees' children in schooling.

**A**nother suggestion worth exploring is the creation of a national elementary education fund.<sup>11</sup> Donations and contributions to such a fund could be provided with liberal tax incentives, such as those given to higher/higher professional education and literacy campaigns (saksharata samithis). Contributions may be generated on a voluntary basis through innovative approaches. It may be made obligatory on the part of all manufacturing firms (excluding household and small scale units) to necessarily make provision for elementary education of the children of their employees, either directly or through financial contributions to the fund.

At the same time, it may be reiterated that, given (a) the spirit of the Constitution and the UN/UNESCO dec-

larations and conventions on the rights of children, (b) our own experience and, (c) international experience with reference to financing basic education, non-governmental contributions will be peripheral in quantum, the government—union and state—has no choice but to shoulder the total responsibility of financing elementary education in India.

**I**n a few years we will celebrate the centenary year of Gopal Krishna Gokhale's introduction of a resolution for free compulsory education in the Imperial Assembly. Whether his dream materializes into a reality we can be proud of is for us to decide.

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11. This could be on the lines of the Socially Useful Development Fund for Compulsory Education in Yugoslavia.

# External funds, internal conflicts

VINOD RAINA

THAT nearly half India's adult population is still non-literate is perhaps the most significant composite indicator of the maldevelopment afflicting the country 50 years after Independence. Above all, it is a strong indictment of the country's school education efforts; all the 15+ adults who are the 'targets' of the ongoing literacy campaigns were, at some point of time, either never enrolled or dropped out from the school system. Since the stretched TLC target is 15-45 years, it is clear that every individual from this non-literate target group was born in independent India. Instead of harping on what the colonial rule did to us, we need to honestly admit that the failure is of the state and civil society of free India.

Suddenly, however, in the past few years, there has been a great deal of flurry about elementary education. Government documents and posturing would suggest that a great leap for-

ward, in the form of externally funded programmes, in particular the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), is the magic that has eluded the country. With its discovery, consultants, state project staff and appraisal missions are scurrying to all parts of the country, giving an impression of frenetic activity.

Both for the apparent substitution of the term elementary by primary in the acronym DPEP, implying an amendment of the constitutionally directed upper age of 14 to 10 or 11 for free and compulsory education, and for a variety of other significant reasons, it is important to examine the implications of external funds to a sector like school education. Here the political and policy battles have always been for increased internal government funding.

In a nutshell then, what are the problems of elementary education? There are some obvious shortcomings

like a lack of schools, shortage of adequate number of teachers and so on, which are fairly well understood. But the magnitude of even these well-known issues is usually underplayed. The Government of India figures would tend to reduce the problem of universalisation of elementary education (UEE) to finding avenues to give some form of education to about 25 million children, age 6-14, which it contends are out of school. But let us try some back of the envelope calculations.

**T**he 1991 census population of about 170 million of 6-14 year olds would easily project to over 200 million by 1997, so let us choose the lower bound of 200 million. With the exception of smaller states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh, the national average dropout rate by class eight (around age 14) is well over 50%. If we also take into account the never enrolled – read non-sustained enrolment, since on paper most of the children are enrolled – it would still be safe to conclude that about half the population, i.e. 100 million children, are out of schools as dropouts or never enrolled. Of these perhaps about 45 million are working children. One aspect of UEE would therefore necessitate finding ways and means to expand the school system to nearly double of what it is now, in terms of teachers and physical infrastructure, so as to cover all the children by formal schooling.

But that is not all there is to UEE. The 46th round of the NSS confirms what field groups in education have already known for long, that one of the major causes for dropouts is a lack of interest in the schools. Combine that with the recent confirmation of another well known fact through NCERT research, that the achievement levels of a majority of school going children, even in Kerala, particularly in language and numeracy, are at the

level of non-literates. The conclusion is inescapable. There is no comfort in the thought that about 100 million children are in schools – attending school does not guarantee that a majority of children come out even with sustained literacy, being educated is a far cry.

If the objective of school education is to have universal coverage with sustained enrolment and adequate achievement, the task then is: (a) to create schooling facilities for another 100 million children; (b) to ensure interest, relevance and quality for the entire 200 million population so that adequate achievements are attained.

Article 45 of the Constitution of India directs that the state shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution (1950), free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years. That should have happened by 1960, but it has not. The government is now proposing to bring in legislation, nearly 50 years later, to translate this directive into a fundamental right of every child between 6 to 14 years of age. Will that help? The so called political will, reflected mostly through necessary and adequate financial allocations, to fulfil either the constitutional directive or the proposed legislation, has been conspicuously lacking till now.

**W**hat would be needed to fulfil the twin objectives outlined above? A linear extrapolation of financial requirements suggests that the current total plan expenditure of the centre and states of about Rs 19500 crore rupees – about 3.9 % of the GDP – would need to be nearly double, say about Rs 40,000 crore, to maintain school infrastructure, teaching-learning processes and teachers at the present woefully inadequate quality.

The financial implications of the two together, universal coverage and quality, would necessitate a substantial increase, to around Rs 55,000 crore. The Kothari Commission, in 1968, had recommended that at least 6% of GDP be earmarked for education, a figure committed by the government through policy pronouncements since the nine-country 'Education for All' summit in 1994. The Saikia Committee, which examined the financial implications of bringing in legislation that would make education a fundamental right, has recommended a sum of Rs 40,000 crore for the Ninth Plan.

**T**his brings us to the rather complicated issue of financing elementary education in India. Education being a concurrent subject under India's Constitution, its financing is the shared responsibility of the central and state governments. About 90% of such funding comes from the states and only about 10% from the centre. Even though the Constitution talks of free elementary education, households have a major share in expenditure. Thus, state governments, households and the central government, in that order, are the main contributors to school education. In terms of the share of total recurrent budgetary resources of the government, it is significant to note that the share of 13.4% in 1994-95 is below the average of 17.5% for all low-income countries, excluding India and China. Most of the governments in developing countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Thailand have invested much more in elementary education than India.

State expenditures as a share of GDP vary considerably. In 1992-93, state education spending ranged from 3.0 to 7.5% of domestic product in the major states – Assam (6.0), Bihar (5.0), Haryana (3.0), Karnataka (4.3),

Kerala (7.5); Maharashtra (3.3), Tamil Nadu (4.5), and U.P. (4.0). The composition of such relatively low expenditures is noticeably unbalanced. Salaries account for roughly 97% of education department expenditures in primary schools and 96% in middle schools, while libraries, consumables, equipment, and furniture account for only 0.18%. In many states, incentives like free textbooks, uniforms, and scholarships are given from programmes and budgets outside that of the education department. If these programmes are included, salaries account for 93%, incentives 5%, and all other inputs just 2%.

**T**he central government allocates 2.5% of its total expenditure to education, funding about 11% of all education expenditure. Though this share is comparatively small, it is of strategic significance. Since most of the state expenditure goes to teacher salaries, the small central share is used to fund new programmes, for improving the teaching-learning process and to expand existing programmes. Schemes like Operation Blackboard, Improvement of Science Education, Innovative and Experimental Education are examples of where central funds are used. Consequently, the central government has a greater influence over the future evolution of the education system than its overall expenditure share might suggest, a fact that is of considerable significance as we examine the DPEP.

Rather than fulfil policy obligations to provide increased funds for education from its own sources, the Government of India has embarked on a questionable borrowing of massive amount of funds for elementary education from a variety of external sources in the past few years. Though most of these funds are soft loans that the country has to repay, they are

transferred as grants to the state governments under the DPEP.

Modest externally funded projects have existed even prior to DPEP. The Mahila Samakhyā Programme, Shikshā Karmi Project in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh Education Programme (APEP) are some examples. The era of big budget external programmes was ushered in by the Bihar Education Project (BEP) in 1991. The total budget outlay for BEP was around Rs 360 crore shared in the ratio of 3:2:1 between UNICEF, central and the state governments. This was rapidly followed by the U.P. Basic Education Programme in 1993, which saw the entry of The World Bank through its soft loan window, the International Development Agency (IDA) for a total outlay of around Rs 730 crore. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), which funds the Shiksha Karmi Project, was persuaded in 1992 to fund another school education project in Rajasthan, the Lok Jumbish Project, for a total outlay up to phase three of about Rs 500 crore. The European Union entered to fund the Madhya Pradesh programme that has now been expanded to cover 34 of the 45 districts of the state.

**W**ith The World Bank willing to provide large scale soft loans and other funding agencies prepared to chip in, the central government along the line consolidated all the funds into a single programme, the District Primary Education Programme, to be implemented according to a blueprint that was prepared by The World Bank. Significantly, Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi and some other programmes retained their independence and remain outside the DPEP. The Government of India has created a separate DPEP bureau, in its Department of Education, that now functions in par-

allel with an already existing elementary education bureau.

Recently, a joint UN initiative, comprising of UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, UNESCO, UNFPA, on community based education has been launched. It has a comparatively modest budget, and will be serviced by the EE rather than the DPEP bureau. Now two bureaus will look after elementary education in the ministry at the centre — one controlling mostly internal and the other external funds. Given the differing clouts they have in terms of the money they control, as also the differing nature of their functioning, what the impact will be on the ground remains to be seen.

**T**he major shift that DPEP promises is to make educational planning less haphazard and centralised. Schools are normally opened on the whims of political or other influential persons, as a 'gift' to a village or community — without a proper survey of needs, suitability of location, and so on. The DPEP approach, as the name implies, requires a proper district level planning, done mostly by the staff of the education department of the district, to systematically identify the various needs and approaches. Every district prepares its own plan and funds are released after due appraisal.

The major emphasis is on capacity building, quality improvement and decentralised planning. No recurrent expenditures like teacher salaries are allowed since it is a seven year programme. Construction costs are restricted to 24% of the total district project cost. Capacity building includes strengthening of the District Institutes for Education Training (DIET) and, at the state level, of the SCERT's and starting a new State Institute for Educational Management and Training (SIEMT). A series of appraisals from central teams and a great deal of



report writing and form filling constitute the mandatory monitoring and evaluation procedures that all states must adhere to.

**M**uch of what is there in the DPEP blueprint at a planning and management level, is so obvious that one wonders whether it requires external funds to initiate such procedures. Expenditure of internal funds and programmes too should be similarly planned and managed. Perhaps internal funds are so influenced by political and bureaucratic control that proper planning, whenever envisaged, remains mostly on paper. Is DPEP immune from such influences, and does it really operate in the decentralised manner that it espouses? A few instances are enough to show that this is not the case.

Take district level planning for instance. No two districts in India are the same, in terms of size or educational needs. That is why district level planning sounds sensible. The first drafts of the district level plans for Madhya Pradesh, though deficient in methodological and technical aspects, did take into account many district specific parameters. In the process a large district with 29 blocks produced a seven year project for Rs 95 crore, and a smaller district with only six blocks worked out a plan for Rs 17 crore. Then came an oral directive: all district plans must be roughly of the same amount, around Rs 40 crore, a guideline that still operates. This made a complete mockery of the much touted district planning.

With such a guideline, one could make district plans sitting in New Delhi or Washington using district data from a source like Nicnet. The plight of the district functionaries of these two M.P. districts was lamentable, particularly in the smaller district. Their attempt to raise the amount from Rs 17 to Rs 40 crore, with imag-

ined costs, was hilarious. What is the meaning of district planning under a politically motivated guideline which demands uniform district project expenditure?

As mentioned earlier, central expenditure on education, with DPEP now being the major component of such expenditure, has strategic significance since it covers vital areas of teaching-learning and quality that the state funds virtually ignore. Given that the quality of education, revealed through achievement level surveys, is abysmal countrywide (even in a state like Kerala which has more or less achieved universal access and retention), there is a massive wastage of even the current low expenditure since schooling fails to create literacy among children. More funds in such a scenario would simply mean higher wastage of money.

**T**he claim of DPEP is that this is precisely the area it would focus on. A laudable objective but how is it different from what exists? A few years back, NCERT produced an answer in the Minimum Levels of Learning or MLL—a document which prescribes a detailed list of concepts for each subject at the primary school level (not worked out for the upper primary). It is the contention of many NCERT related educationists that if books are evolved around each concept listed in the MLL document, achievement levels and quality of education will improve.

This document and its contentions were debated even prior to DPEP and it was pointed out that quality improvement at the primary level though achievable is a complex objective. It needs to account for the varying cultural, socio-economic, environmental and experience base and child development factors in the country; it cannot be 'prescribed' through a binding

and norm-setting national list of competencies, which is essentially the MLL approach. Ignoring most of these field based objections, the MLL approach sets the agenda for evolving new books in the DPEP states. There is therefore, nothing of substance in the area of quality improvement that DPEP adds.

DPEP further avoids a major question. Focusing on quality improvement is fine, but what kind of a person will emerge through the improved teaching-learning process? The predominant rationale for UEE nowadays is couched in developmental language — that better educated populations have lower fertility or infant mortality rates and are able to participate better in the increasingly globalised world. These are ideological statements, capable of a variety of interpretations. Must education have only an instrumental value like reducing fertility, assuming of course that the correlation is universally valid? To participate better in the globalised world could mean anything, including just being literate and skilled enough to be a disciplined worker and consumer in the prevailing market economy, without in any way being a threat to it.

**I**n this country, many fine minds have debated the purpose of education and the relationship between education and society. We talk of Gandhian education, we are aware of Tagore's view on education, and we know the consequences of colonial education. Extending beyond, we have the Friarian notion of education for empowerment and critical consciousness that many groups have worked with in our country. We could improve the quality of these approaches, singly and together. But what are we focusing on? Replacing such seminal questions by concentrating on bringing in some-

thing like MLL based books is trivialising the very basis we wish to improve.

**A** major weakness of DPEP is that it has not consciously tried to promote alternative institutional mechanisms and decentralised processes for quality improvement. It relies on the same old NCERT/SCERT structure without attempting to transform its functioning – from norm setting to resource support for local capacity building. The approach promotes a centralised functioning whereby educational expertise is sought to be concentrated in these institutions from where it can then trickle down into the field. Participatory functioning becomes a mere token under this overarching attitude.

Worse, DPEP relies on an institution few people in the country know about. This is the Educational Consultants India Limited, EdCil for short. As the name implies, this institution hosts consultants at high salaries who cannot otherwise be accommodated in usual government institutions, given their financial norms. These consultants, many of them without even a nodding acquaintance of rural based school education or pedagogy and child development, criss-cross the country to provide resource support to state education departments. Given their high salaries and perks, they often bring with them a style of functioning that produces a great deal of discontent in the field among education staff used to a culture of thrift and modest expenditures.

This raises aspirations among the local staff that they too could perhaps find a foothold in a much more remunerative DPEP posting, training programme or workshop. Since DPEP covers only a few districts in every state and the rest remain as they were, at the ground level DPEP and non-DPEP

expenditures and cultures produce undesirable human conflicts, given the disparity between DPEP consultants and expenditures of EdCil and other institutions at the central level. Many of the DPEP districts have already gone through or are in the midst of an intense literacy campaign, which is based on voluntary participation of thousands of district level persons. In many of these districts, the DPEP culture is completely alien and negates the spirit of volunteerism, or modest use of resources.

**I**t is easy to be critical but difficult to suggest proactive alternative agendas. It is incumbent for a practitioner, however, to indicate and work for such alternatives. It also needs to be remembered that no matter how a project blueprint may be written, it is always possible to strategise its implementation, for good or bad. The DPEP programme produced an awkward situation for a long serving voluntary group, Eklavya, in Madhya Pradesh. Having developed innovative packages in collaboration with the state education department after many years of intensive field work, particularly in areas like curriculum development, pedagogy, teacher training and examinations, DPEP on paper seemed to provide an opportunity to extend and deepen these approaches. But its policy framework and external funding were somewhat questionable.

Instead of boycotting the programme, Eklavya intervened vigorously to ensure that the process of change would not remain confined only to DPEP areas, but extend to the entire state. While doing so, however, it refrained from securing any funds from the DPEP budget to meet its own financial needs. But this remarkable and fragile experiment is currently under a cloud since the same political and bureaucratic influence that DPEP

was supposed to be immune from, has reversed some path-breaking policy and implementation aspects that had attracted many other states. This case study vividly brings to life many of the above concerns regarding the implementational aspects of a programme like DPEP. To get a proper flavour of the high and low of this process, the story needs to be told in some detail.

In July 1996, the Government of Madhya Pradesh introduced a new teaching-learning package, called Seekhna-Sikhana in class one in all the schools of 16 districts of the state. This was the first phase for overhauling its approach to elementary education under its DPEP initiative. In July 1997, the package was extended to classes one, two and three for the entire state. What is not apparent from this bland statement is a process that can be traced back 25 years.

**S**ome time in 1971, two voluntary groups, Friend's Rural Centre and Kishore Bharati, working in the district of Hoshangabad in M.P. approached the state education department to allow them to work in a few government rural schools of the district with a view to improve science teaching. Legend has it that the then Director of Public Instruction called a meeting of his educational experts to seek their views on the matter. They strongly opposed the proposal, citing dangers of allowing intervention by non-governmental agencies in formal education, as also the lack of degrees (B.Ed., M.Ed.) of the persons involved (even though many of them had Ph.D's from reputed institutions), and so on.

The DPI reportedly over-ruled the learned advice, remarking: 'The state of primary education in M.P. is so bad that these organisations are unlikely to make it any worse – who knows something good may come out

of their attempt, so let us allow them.' Prophetic words indeed, since the process leading up to the Seekhna-Sikhana package may be traced to such a feudal sounding decree of a concerned, sensitive and decisive officer. This was the first, and continues to be the only, example of a government allowing NGOs access to its schools for quality improvement in an integrated manner. It involved the development of innovative teaching-learning material, teacher training, examination methodology and a facilitating administrative and management structure.

**T**his gave birth to the rather well-known Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) in 1972, which began as an experimental programme in 16 rural government middle schools in the district. The implementation of the programme required another important institutional mechanism in terms of replication and expansion of the process. The need to involve motivated professionals to help catalyse and evolve teaching-learning materials and conduct teacher orientations led to the creation of a resource group drawn from institutions like the Delhi University, Tata Institute for Fundamental Research, IIT's, and later from the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, National Institute for Immunology, and most important, from the colleges within Madhya Pradesh.

The involvement of college and university professionals was facilitated through a formal intervention by the University Grants Commission. Consequently, scores of science professionals could be seen at *shivirs* and in schools in remote areas of the district, rubbing shoulders with village teachers to participatively create an activity, discovery and environment based methodology for science

teaching that stressed on critical consciousness.

From a 16 school experiment, HSTP was expanded to cover all the middle schools of Hoshangabad district in 1978. This expansion saw the direct involvement of the NCERT with the programme through its Regional Institute for Education located at Bhopal. Such geographical expansion was accompanied by a great deal of unease regarding the choice of the entry point for intervention. It had become increasingly evident that the foundations for under-achievement of children were laid at the primary stage, so that a majority of children at the middle stage could hardly read a paragraph or do simplest of arithmetic. Doing better science at the middle stage, though desirable, seemed hampered by the absence of a similar intervention at the primary stage, beginning from class one.

The abysmal achievement levels of children encountered have now been confirmed by the nationwide surveys done for DPEP by the NCERT, but few education professionals then believed that they could be so low. This underscores the point that merely providing access for schooling is insufficient unless quality improvement takes place in parallel and not subsequently, if achievements are to increase and, most importantly, if non-enrolment and dropouts due to lack of relevance and interest in elementary education have to be rectified.

**B**etween 1980 and 1982, important events were to shape the course for future action. Friend's Rural Centre opted out of the programme in 1980 and Kishore Bharati's priorities too started to undergo a change. It was increasingly felt that the future expansion of HSTP would have to go hand in hand with expansion into other subjects like social sciences, and defi-

nately, at the primary stage. To undertake these responsibilities some resource persons of HSTP decided to give up their professional careers and work full time in Madhya Pradesh. They founded a new group, Eklavya. The NGO part of HSTP was transferred to Eklavya in 1982 and it has carried forward the work in subsequent years. The founding principle of Eklavya, summarised in a document presented to the Planning Commission in 1981, was 'to evolve mechanisms for implementing micro level innovations at a macro level.' The need to go beyond small intensive efforts was clearly enunciated in the document.

**B**y 1986, Eklavya, with the concurrence of the state education department, expanded the HSTP to school complexes in 13 more districts of M.P. Significantly, it was able to locate and attract full-timers and resource persons to undertake the development of social science for middle schools and primary school teaching-learning processes. Choosing about 40 experimental schools in both tribal and non-tribal regions during a period of eight years up to 1994, Eklavya, in partnership with the SCERT completed the development, through intense field interaction, of an integrated primary school package called Khushi-Khushi.

The package included teaching-learning materials, teacher training methodology, non invasive student evaluation methods and a facilitating administrative and management structure – all within the state education department, just as in HSTP. The basic approach continued to be activity, discovery and environment based, along with many child development criteria, keeping in view the younger age of children compared to that in the HSTP.

By 1994, the state education department had its own agenda for

improving primary education, in the form of DPEP, for 19 districts of the state. Without utilising DPEP funds for its own organisational work, Eklavya decided to participate, both at the policy and implementation level in partnership with the state government. Quite apart from what Eklavya may or may not have done, the critical factor is that during these 25 years nearly 5000 school teachers, principals, head masters, DIET faculty, administrators from the ground level to the state capital have interacted in some way or the other with the HSTP, social science, or primary school programmes of Eklavya, and they are available to the state education department for further work.

Such a large human force, exposed in varying degrees to new and innovative ideas, also acts as a strong but silent motivating factor in shaping policy and implementation strategies. Their influence can be discerned from what happened in M.P. One of the major policy decisions taken by the M.P. government was to set up a state level Technical Resource Support Group (TRSG). It became the apex policy-making body for academic decisions, not only for DPEP, and this is significant, but for the entire elementary education in the state. Eminent practitioners and educationists from all over the country were made members of TRSG, which resulted in some radical policy initiatives.

**P**erhaps the most significant of such initiatives was the decision to open the development of teaching-learning materials to any group, governmental or non-governmental, university or institute. It was to be undertaken through field work in experimental schools and with the active participation of the teachers of such schools, utilising at least one year for the development of material for

each class. In this process the SCERT, which had the responsibility and monopoly for such a task earlier, was envisaged as only one of the trial agencies. Now it too would have to develop material in the field rather than sitting in the state capital. The trial agencies would have continuous peer interaction throughout the year. The materials and methodologies would be consolidated by them together to form the material for each class for the entire state. It was later envisaged that region specific materials could also be created and used, rather than depending on a single set of materials for the entire state.

**I**t was such a process that helped in evolving the Seekhna-Sikhana package for class one to three. The approach, methodology and contents of Seekhna-Sikhana closely resemble that of Eklavya's Khushi-Khushi. What is significant is that the new package was no longer the experimental effort of a particular group, but had been mainstreamed for the state.

The understanding that the focus of interventions must be on the entire educational system, and not the DPEP areas only, resulted in another significant policy decision of the TRSG, accepted by the state government, that all new efforts would be implemented throughout the entire state. This meant not only that the state government would invest more on elementary education, but necessitated a major change in the administrative structure to ensure, for example, that each teacher goes through a content based in-service training for each class and so on. A cluster level model, going beyond the block, was evolved to handle such academic requirements.

The Madhya Pradesh experience clearly suggests that despite many problems and pitfalls, community, NGO and government partner-

ships are feasible and perhaps the only way to achieve UEE with quality improvements. But that will not happen by mere rhetoric. The government needs to decide as a policy to open to formal school education for intervention by community and non government groups.

A couple of things need to be highlighted from this experience. DPEP could be transformed in this manner in M.P. because adequate capacity to deal with both academic and management aspects existed within the state, both in the governmental and non-governmental sector. An accommodating political climate enabled a few persons to put into place a policy framework that facilitated subsequent fieldwork. In a sense, rather than using the term participation rhetorically, it was given an institutional shape. In the process, the state was able to work without any dependence on the centralised DPEP support system of its consultants and EdCil. But elsewhere, where adequate local capacity is either weak or not properly harnessed, the dependence on consultancy help from Delhi is heavy, and can have disastrous consequences.

**J**ust how fragile these arrangements can be was demonstrated in the past few months in M.P. With the state assembly elections approaching, the interests of party MLA's and ministers became paramount and the facilitating political climate vanished. The first step to protect these interests was to change officials who were not sufficiently accommodating. It was also decided to give up the participatory manner of creating teaching-learning materials, and follow the MLL approach instead. New initiatives, like the Education Guarantee Scheme of the state government, are now being actively promoted in the media. As a local initiative, it offers a better

political potential in the election year than a central scheme. That the EGS promises a novice teacher at a low salary, diluting the state's responsibility to provide quality education is completely ignored in the process.

No better evidence can be provided to underscore the point that DPEP, with all its techno-managerial paraphernalia is as prone to be affected by political and bureaucratic whims as any other education programme. The objectives it promotes, even when desirable, have been and can be undone in the same manner as in any other programme.

If a reason to promote external funds is that they can be made immune from such interference, then this is simply not true. The setting up of a separate bureau in the Ministry at Delhi, linking the National Elementary Education Mission (NEEM) to just DPEP and not the entire elementary education of the country (which is currently under review), or relying on a consultancy agency for nationwide resource back up, are institutional arrangements which cannot guarantee immunity. Such arrangements have led to a fracturing of school education into two power blocks, one handling internal and the other external funds. School education will be the ultimate loser in the subsequent haranguing.

Finally, external soft loans of a seven year duration not only have to be paid back with interest, but need to be replaced by internal funds to sustain the process. There is therefore no escape from providing the necessary funds for education internally. Is it not curious that while 6% of the GDP cannot be found for education, about 17% of the GDP is deployed as subsidies benefiting not the poor, but the middle and upper classes? Political will implies the doing away such subsidies and making provision for an even higher allocation than 6% of the GDP for education.

## The rural scene

A. VAIDYANATHAN

THE New Economic Policy launched in 1991 – variously described as structural adjustment, liberalisation and globalisation – has attracted criticism on diverse grounds. The likely adverse social consequences of reform figure prominently among the concerns of critics. It was feared that increased competition by dismantling controls and 'opening' the economy though desirable, would also lead to increased unemployment, at any rate in the transitional phase, especially in the informal sector.

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\* This article is based on the findings of a national research project on Strategies and Financing of Human Development sponsored by the Government of India and funded by UNDP and IDRC. Under this project – coordinated by Professor T.N. Krishnan – detailed studies of elementary education in nine major states, spanning the entire spectrum of educational achievement, were carried out. The author, who had the privilege of coordinating this part of the project, would like to record his thanks and appreciation to all participant researchers.

The emphasis on reduced public spending (as against increasing revenues by more effective enforcement of tax laws) as the principal instrument of trimming the fiscal deficit will, under existing power configurations, result in pruning of government outlays on elementary education, basic health care and such other 'basic minimum needs'. Social welfare and other programmes meant to raise incomes and well-being of the poor and disadvantaged would be affected as well. These concerns were strongly voiced at a national seminar held soon after the reforms were announced.

The critics of the NEP were effective to the extent that the proponents of reform conceded the state's responsibility to protect the poor against its possible adverse consequences through appropriate social safety nets and by ensuring that basic minimum need and poverty alleviation programmes do not suffer for lack of funds.

In the event, with the fiscal crunch showing no signs of easing (if anything it is getting worse by the year), financial allocations for these programmes have not increased in real terms. Nor is there any sign of serious efforts to make the programmes more effective. Concern over the impact of reforms therefore remain very much alive.

Following the national seminar referred to above, the Government of India launched a national research project to study various aspects of human development. A series of studies relating to education, health and health care, fertility trends, the public distribution system, employment and social security were commissioned. A large number of researchers from all parts of the country contributed to this project. The agenda of research was formulated after discussion with groups of recognised scholars in each

field; a conscious effort was made to get participating researchers to decide on the principal issues to be studied and agree on a minimum common framework of concepts and methodology. The groups met to review progress in the course of research and to discuss findings at the conclusion of the research. Bringing together researchers with an active interest in the selected areas into an interactive network was an important fallout of the project.

In the sphere of education, the focus of research was primarily on literacy and elementary education in rural areas. The crucial role of elementary education in socio-economic development is now universally accepted: A literate and well educated population contributes to growth by enabling people to acquire knowledge and skills. Education is among the most effective means for advancement available to the poor and disadvantaged. It not only equips them to take advantage of the growing and diverse opportunities opened by growth, but also helps empower them. Education increases social awareness, the capacity to articulate interests and concerns in the political arena and to exert organised pressure to protect and promote these interests.

The Indian Constitution specifies the attainment of universal elementary education among the Directive Principles of State Policy. That this objective has not yet been achieved and that nearly half of the India's population remains illiterate 50 years after Independence is rightly counted among the major failures of Indian planning. Even more disconcerting is the fact that literacy rates and education levels among the disadvantaged groups (women, scheduled caste and tribes) remain much below that of the rest of the population.

The preparatory workshop therefore decided that the studies sponsored under the national project should focus on elementary education in rural India and more particularly the vast and persistent differences in literacy and schooling of children between and within regions, as well as social groups. It was decided to assess the nature and extent of these variations and the underlying factors on the basis of data available from sources such as the decennial population censuses and the National Sample Survey.

This was followed by a survey of some 90 villages spread over seven states to get a more detailed picture of the current position in terms of schooling of children, parental and teacher attitudes, and the condition of schools. The villages were selected by a three step process: In each state one district with relatively superior educational performance (judged by level and the rate of improvement in literacy) and one poorly performing district were first selected. Within each of these districts, generally two tehsils/blocks, and then villages within them, were again selected on the basis of relative educational performance.

The findings of the individual state studies – available in a series of discussion papers and currently in the process of being finalised for publication – cannot be adequately summarised in the space of a brief article. We can only hope to highlight some of the major conclusions and their implications for policy.

Literacy rates of various groups in rural areas (male and female, scheduled castes/tribes and the rest, rural and urban areas), though differing systematically, are highly correlated. Moreover, the inter-group disparities decline (though they don't disappear) as the general level of literacy rises.

This means, for example, that female literacy tends to be high (low), and difference between male and female literacy is narrow (wide), wherever male literacy is high (low). Much the same is true of scheduled castes and tribes, except that their literacy levels are much below those of rest of the population. There are many districts in central India where overall literacy rates do not exceed 10%; and female literacy rates are less than 5%.

**L**iteracy rates have risen in most districts and in all groups; areas with low literacy have, in general, experienced a faster spread in education, thus narrowing the spatial disparities in this respect. However, there are pockets of persistent backwardness: of areas with a low rate of literacy experiencing a relatively slow pace of improvement. This feature comes out more sharply when we look at performance at the level of *taluks* and villages. There are even cases where the literacy rate seems to have actually declined. This phenomenon is noticed in several states including Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Universal school enrolment of 5-14 year old children has not been achieved by any state, except Kerala. Those not currently attending school include those who have never been enrolled as well as those who have discontinued. The incidence of both, though varying across villages, is in general higher among females than males, among SC/ST than among the rest of the population, and among the poorer segments of the people. High non-enrolment rates seem to be associated with low continuance rates: that is, educationally backward areas/groups send fewer children to school and prematurely withdraw those enrolled. The surveys confirm that age at entry into school is considerably higher than 5 years. Enrolment rate in

the early ages is low, but builds up later. Discontinuance rates are higher in the 10-14 age group.

That enrolment rates, and the duration of completed education, increase with economic status (measured by per capita consumption) is not news. But it is significant that gender disparities in both respects are much lower among the more prosperous households than the poor ones; the difference being more pronounced in discontinuance rate and years of completed education as we move up the income scale. On the other hand, the persistence of disparities even in prosperous households suggests that differences in social attitudes to education are an important factor to be reckoned with.

**E**nrolment and discontinuance are affected by the characteristics of children and the household to which they belong, village characteristics, and access to schools. Except Kerala and parts of Tamil Nadu, which have achieved universal or near universal enrolment, children of upper castes and economically better-off households, and whose parents are better educated are, in general, more likely to be enrolled and attending school. In some cases the educational level of both parents seem to have a significant influence; while in others, mother's or the father's education seems more important. The influence of parental education on boys and girls schooling does not seem to follow the same pattern in all areas. Female children and children who are lower in the birth order are less likely to be in school.

In some areas the number of infants and old people relative to the number of adult females, the number of animals to be tended, and the distance to fuel and water sources affect enrolment as well as continuance. Their influence is more marked on the

girl children, and in some areas (notably Orissa, Uttarakhand) than others. Distance to school, pupil teacher ratio, teachers' qualification – all of which reflect the supply of educational facilities – are seen to have a significant bearing in several areas, especially on enrolment of girls. While there are strong commonalities in the relation between educational performance and likely 'explanatory' variables, the studies also highlight the great diversity of situations in different regions.

Economic well-being, educational capability and better social status are among the reasons most frequently cited by parents for schooling their children. These motivations are stronger in the case of boys. In the case of girls, education (or rather prolonged education), is not seen as desirable because it makes marriage, and ensuring observance of prevailing norms regarding gender roles, more difficult.

**M**ost villages now have a primary school within a kilometre. Most children in primary classes are in government (including local body) schools and private schools aided by government. In general, private aided school play a more important role in the middle school stage. Their share in enrolment of 5-14 years old, however, varies a great deal across study villages. Private unaided schools (run by religious organisations, charitable institutions and poorer private enterprises) play a relatively minor role in elementary education in most selected villages, but they seem to be a significant presence in some areas. The survey villages in Ballia district of U.P. have as many as a fourth of the children in such schools, the proportion rising to nearly 45% in Rampur.

School facilities are grossly inadequate and of poor quality; some

do not have any buildings, most do not have enough class rooms, single teacher schools are quite common in villages surveyed, and many have fewer teachers than classes. While teachers have the requisite qualifications, absenteeism is common, classes are not held regularly, and teaching aides are unavailable. Teachers, on their part, complain of inadequate facilities, excessive burden of non-teaching tasks, difficulties of getting pay regularly and lack of interest on the part of parents and children. There is little interaction between teachers and parents. Children of lower castes complain of prejudice and discrimination. The system of inspection and supervision does not work. Teachers are effectively not accountable for their performance.

**G**overnment and aided schools provide tuition free education; and there are numerous schemes (of uneven coverage) for providing books, uniforms, mid-day meals and other assistance. Nevertheless, partly because of partial coverage and poor delivery, parents have to incur substantial expenditure to educate their children. The average cost per student in elementary class varies from Rs 120 per annum in villages of Rampur (U.P.) to Rs 550 in Kerala. People in rural areas tend to spend more on educating their boys than girls. Most expenditure is on account of books, uniforms and special fees (e.g., examinations). Travel and private tuition are the other main items, but these are relatively minor in comparison. The overall average cost in aided private schools is much higher than in government schools, the difference being as much as five times in some cases.

Poorer people spend less on the average than the better-off, partly because they send their children to government schools. Even so, relative

to their total resources, the poor spend more than the well-to-do. For instance, NSS data show that on the average a rural household in Maharashtra spends around 2.5% of its total consumption outlays on primary education. The comparable proportion for the poorest quintile of the population is actually somewhat higher, despite the fact that fewer of their children are at school for a shorter duration and that they rely much more on public schools.

Non governmental organisations play an important role both in generating mass awareness of the importance of education and in actual conduct of schools. Historically, social reform movements played an important role in spearheading the spread of education in Kerala and Tamil Nadu; so have Christian missionaries, especially in Kerala, parts of Tamil Nadu and the tribal areas of Bihar. The Lok Jumbish is currently playing a similar role in Rajasthan. The Total Literacy Campaign has also helped to create widespread interest in education. But the experience of Kerala makes it clear that while NGOs can create the demand, significant and sustained progress in raising literacy requires a strong state commitment backed by adequate funding. The inadequacy of public funding is certainly an important factor impeding the spread of elementary education.

**R**eligious and caste organisations and a variety of charitable organisations play an important role in setting up and managing schools, most of which receive government aid. The number of private unaided schools, though still marginal in most places, is growing even in villages. Private schools seem to be – and there is corroborating evidence from our study – better run in terms of regular-

ity of classes and quality of teaching. They spend more per student, and so do parents of children studying in such schools. Such schools are beyond the reach of the poor and the disadvantaged groups in villages. Altogether, there is considerable differentiation within the elementary school system, and this is likely to increase as private schools grow in importance. The social consequences of this phenomenon should be a matter of far greater concern than at present.

**A** lack of interest in education is no longer the main constraint on reducing universal enrolment of children in schools. Mass awareness of the importance of education is spreading among all sections due to a variety of factors, including the spread of education among parents, the realisation that education is essential to avail of expanding non-agricultural job opportunities and that education is a means to empowerment. Indeed, there are regions, religious communities and castes where social attitudes impede spread of education. But the situation is rapidly changing even in these segments.

The spread of education itself is a major solvent of these constraints: the more education spreads, the stronger becomes the demand for education from backward castes, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women. This suggests that vigorous efforts to spread elementary education across the board, by providing more easily accessible, better equipped schools of good quality, must be the central thrust of policy. This should be supplemented by active encouragement and support to NGOs and reform movements to overcome prejudices and raise mass interest in education among the laggard regions and social groups. These efforts must, however, recognise and adapt to the specific situa-



tions, which are marked by great diversity.

Economic factors – like inadequate means, the pre-emption of children's time for household work and for supplementing family income – continue to be an important impediment to enrolment and continuance in school. Raising incomes of the poor, reducing (the presently considerable) private costs of elementary education, and measures which help reduce claims on women's (and girls) time for activities like collecting fuel, fetching water, tending animals, taking care of siblings and the old, will therefore have a significant stimulating effect on demand for education. A rapid rise in employment opportunities and income of the poor (through faster growth, supplemented by more effectively targeted poverty alleviation programmes), basic social security against contingencies like disease, disability and death will clearly help.

**E**nsuring free and timely supply of books and uniforms to all school going children, wider coverage of school feeding programmes, reducing the distance from houses to school, and measures which increase supply of fuel and water closer to homes will substantially reduce private costs. Expanding the coverage of these programmes and, more important, ensuring that they are effectively implemented, can thus make a significant contribution to speedier progress toward universal elementary education.

These measures, however, need to be accompanied by improvements in the functioning of schools. Part of the problem is to ensure minimum physical facilities necessary for holding claims and effective teaching. Single teacher schools, and multi-grade teaching are inimical to both the

spread of education, and its quality. But equally important is an improvement in regularity of classes and quality of teaching. Effective mechanisms to make schools and teachers accountable for their performance are urgently needed.

**A**t present the entire responsibility for deciding all key functions – namely where, what type of schools are to be set up, construction of school buildings, appointments, promotions, transfers and disciplining of teachers, for financing expenditure – are in the hands of the state government. Private aided schools, though subject to government control and regulation, have somewhat greater latitude. But the village communities who are to be served by the schools have no say in the matter. Their interaction with schools and teachers is minimal. They have no means of ensuring that schools function, leave alone function well. The public school system is in pretty bad shape.

Corrective action will, of course, require massive increase in public outlays to expand and improve school facilities, appoint adequate teachers and strengthen incentives for enrolment and continuance. Much of this has necessarily to be the responsibility of the state. However, greater involvement of the local community in setting up and managing the school system is imperative.

First, local communities must be free to decide the location, type and scale of buildings to be constructed from funds provided by the state government; they must be free to supplement this from developmental resources devolved by the state to local bodies under the new panchaytiraj (PR) system, and such additional resources as they may mobilise on their own for this purpose. Second, local communities and teachers must have flexibility –

subject to broad guidelines – to adapt building designs, teaching and vacation schedules and school timings in the light of local circumstances.

Third, while the government should pay greater attention to curriculum design, supervision and inspection, and prescription of standards, local communities must be given a significant role in monitoring teacher performance, with mechanisms for fair review of complaints and ensuring speedy remedial action. Fourth, if an adequate complement of teaching staff is not available in a school, and the government is unable or unwilling to make good the deficiency, the community should have the freedom to appoint, if it so chooses, additional teachers at their cost and on terms which they can afford. In all these respects, there is need to recognise diversities and provide room – indeed, actively encourage – for local initiative and experimentation.

**O**ver the long run, the proper course would be for elected PR bodies to run the schools, appoint teachers and ensure that they perform their duties to the community's satisfaction. This cannot be accomplished without a drastic change in the uncompromising and total opposition of teachers' unions to decentralisation of educational administration to beneficiary communities subject of course, to well defined norms and regulatory apparatus to enforce them. If this is not done the quality of public education will deteriorate beyond repair. The better-off will not suffer: They have the means to intensify their efforts – already manifest and gathering momentum to privatize even elementary education. The result will be an accentuation of dualism in the educational system and the one's to suffer will be the disadvantaged groups.

# Promises, promises

VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN

INDIA is a country of paradoxes. For almost a century political leaders, social reformers, administrators, social activists and a wide range of opinion leaders have talked about the importance of women and girl's education. Official documents recognise the relationship between women and girl's education and other social development indicators. They express concern over women's low status, declining sex ratios, increasing violence against women, poor health and educational achievements, high mortality and morbidity rates and so on. Almost all political parties talk about the need to enhance women's status.

Every new government appoints committees and commissions to inquire into the situation of women and every few years a new set of recommendations are formulated and released. In the last ten years alone we have seen a National Perspective Plan for Women, the Shram Shakti report of the National Commission on Self-employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, National Policy on Education and Programme of Action (1986 and 1992), strategy papers on

women's policy and women's representation and panchayati raj legislation guaranteeing reservation for women in local self-government institutions. Yet, India is one of several countries where universal elementary education is still a dream. The gap between men and women continues to be wide and all indications are that the situation is not likely to improve for many decades to come.

Scanning through policy documents and official statements reveals an interesting picture. Every document starts by pointing out the dismal situation in the country and proceeds to reiterate government commitment towards initiating 'strong' measures for change. There is little discomfort over the fact that we have been 'talking' about the plight of women, scheduled castes and tribes, people living in backward regions, nomadic communities and urban poor for almost five decades. We have repeatedly emphasised our commitment towards ameliorating the condition of those who live in abject poverty — and yet, in reality, we have become insensitive to their plight.

There is a common belief that we do not have the financial resources to make universal elementary education a reality. The development assistance debate tells another story. For almost four decades the Government of India and dominant nationalist public opinion was not in favour of accepting external assistance for primary education. They consistently argued that resources were not a problem, though higher and technical educational institutions were established with foreign aid and technical support.

**T**here was a change with the 1986 National Policy on Education. By early 1987 official support for harnessing external resources for special education projects gained legitimacy. In the early '80s the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project – Phase I was launched with external assistance. After 1987 a number of programmes and special projects were initiated: Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project (1987), Mahila Samakhya – Education for Women's Equality (1989) in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, Bihar Education Project (1991), Rajasthan Lok Jumbish (1992), U.P. Basic Education Project (1992), and the District Primary Education Programme (1993) in many districts across the country.<sup>1</sup>

Globally, the 1990 Jomtien Conference was a landmark as it reflected a change in international and national thinking about elementary education. Donors recognised that

investment in human resources paid rich economic dividends and it was an effective strategy to address population growth, maternal and child health, mortality and morbidity related issues and labour productivity. Government policy also underwent a radical transformation. Policy-makers and administrators who argued for greater allocations to elementary education realised they could mobilise additional resources through foreign aid. As mentioned above, a wide range of education programmes and projects were introduced with bilateral assistance and by 1992 The World Bank emerged as a major player in the education scene. Soft loans for basic education became politically acceptable.

**F**or almost four and a half decades, educational planning in India was essentially gender blind – despite the introduction of special incentives and schemes to promote girls education. It was rooted in a welfare approach and was indifferent towards gender issues, centuries of caste and community based discrimination, and the special problems of first generation learners. As the women's movement gained strength world-wide, donors lobbied to bridge the gender gap. With external assistance pouring into special basic education initiatives, administrators were more willing to accommodate the gender agenda. Special women's development programmes and special women's components were introduced in innumerable social sector programmes in the '80s and

ing the tenure of Anil Bordia, when foreign aid for elementary education became acceptable across a wide spectrum of political opinion. It was felt that government expenditure on education was so enormous that small doses of foreign aid would not be able to exert too much influence. On the other hand, it was argued, availability of aid would enable the government to harness additional resources to encourage innovations which require small amounts of untied funds.

'90s. The rhetoric and the language of official documents clearly kept pace with global development thinking and trends.

**O**fficial policy recognised the existence of wide gender disparities dating back to the pre-independence period. From the time of the Woods dispatch to the present, the problem of access and delivery systems has attracted wide attention. In the early period, debate on women's education centred around content, the kind of education women should be provided to facilitate participation in educational programmes. However, within a short period, social reformers established the principle of equality by asserting that there should be no differentiation at the primary stage, though the debate continued with regard to higher education.

It is interesting that in the immediate post-independence period the argument centred around the 'universal good' of education for men and women. However, as we reached the '70s, women's education was linked to national demographic goals, maternal and child health, and nutrition related issues. The notion of 'functional literacy' as an instrument or tool to access developmental resources, keep accounts, read information on contraceptives, child care, safe motherhood, nutrition and so on, became a peg on which to hang women's education. This is not to say that the 'universal good' argument was thrown out for a more instrumentalist one; the moot point is that official policy and documents positioned women's literacy as the critical variable positively impacting social and demographic indicators.

It is well-known that the 'economic' benefits of education was not really an issue in the '40s, '50s and even in the '60s. The founding fathers

1. It may be of historical interest to note that the Minister for Human Resource Development, P.V. Narasimha Rao, was also instrumental in ushering in economic reforms when he became the Prime Minister. The process of rethinking was initiated when Anand Sarup was the Secretary. The ground work was done during his tenure. The nation-wide debate on the 'Challenge of Education' set in motion a process of introspection, leading to the formulation of the Nation Policy of Education of 1986. This process was carried forward dur-

of the Indian Constitution did not feel the need to justify compulsory elementary education. It was considered an important investment in national development, in enhancing the quality of life and giving people the wherewithal to survive with dignity in a rapidly changing world. Similarly, way back in the 1940s, the Bhor Committee recommended universal access to primary health care as a legitimate entitlement, something the state was morally bound to provide its citizens. However, as time passed, investment in basic primary health care gave way to disease control programmes on the one hand and population control strategies on the other. As a result, today we have a wide range of parallel special programmes to eradicate something or the other, accelerate fertility decline, improve child survival, promote safe motherhood and control HIV/AIDS pandemic.

It is not that all was well in the 'good old days.' A glaring omission was the inability to address persistent gender, caste and community based disparities in education. There was a general feeling that expanding infrastructure and increasing supply would automatically enhance access. This was true up to a point and female enrolment increased substantially in the first three decades. Even today the rate of increase in female enrolment is higher than that of men. Yet, some socio-economic groups, especially in backward regions, remain where they were a hundred years ago.

While a proportion of people from the disadvantaged groups accessed education, it continued to elude the majority, especially those living in the more backward regions of the country. Successive governments introduced caste based reservations, but enhancing people's ability through good quality education to access these

'reserved' jobs became a major issue, leading to the now infamous, creamy layer debate.<sup>2</sup> The more wealthy, educated and better positioned among the deprived communities cornered the benefits. The situation reached alarming proportions in a few states where some sub-groups captured political and administrative power, leaving the mass of the people, especially women, where they were.

Another major 'planning flaw' (for lack of an alternative terminology) was the spread of meagre resources thinly across the country in primary schools with a ramshackle room and a teacher. Most villages had a single teacher school. When non-formal and adult education programmes were initiated in the late 1970s, a small pitance was paid to part-time 'voluntary' animators (popularly known as instructors) because the government could not afford a decent remuneration across the country. These part-time NFE workers were initially paid Rs 135 per month (increased to Rs 300 in 1996) and were expected to reach out to out-of-school children. With this scheme most areas were 'officially' covered. General disillusionment with the National Adult Education Programme launched in 1979 and its negligible impact made the government withdraw the programme in 1989 and substitute it by the National Literacy Mission. Similar experiences

2. Government of India introduced reservations based on caste as an important part of affirmative action in favour of disadvantaged communities. In the late 1980s a report was tabled in Parliament increasing quotas. This led to nation-wide protest by certain castes and communities who were left out of the list. This also generated a debate on effectiveness of such reservation. Many political commentators argued that a small section of disadvantaged groups benefited from such reservation, leaving the vast majority out of it. This debate is popularly referred to as the 'creamy layer debate'.

in the primary health care system, the ICDS programme and the public distribution system have been noted by researchers and political analysts.

Reviewing the situation, a senior administrator commented: 'Looking at the plans for non-formal education, one finds that it is assumed that, with a band of "committed and selfless", informally trained part-time "teachers" and practically no infrastructure except non-official motivators, millions of pupils can be educated at a fraction of the cost of school education. These assumptions need to be examined with utmost care through randomised sample studies as well as documented records of performance. If the much more difficult task of educating out-of-school children can be performed so cheaply, should we not review the entire system of school education?' (Anand Sarup, 1996)

In the '50s, per capita investment in primary education was at its highest. Thereafter, inflation, increased enrolment, and an increase in the proportion of resources spent on teachers salaries alone ensured that it was a down slide all the way.<sup>3</sup> Too little resources, spread thin generated its own problems. Poor quality schools, unmotivated teachers, an over-stretched administration, shortages of

3. 'As compared to a rate of growth of 13 per cent in current prices (1950-1990), the total expenditure on education at constant price increased at a rate of 5.6 per cent only, the real rate of growth of per capita expenditure was about one-third of that at current prices, and per pupil expenditure in real terms was less than one-fourth.... The relative importance given to education in the five year plans declined gradually from 7.9 per cent in the first plan, to 2.7 per cent in the sixth plan. It is only during the seventh plan (and now in the eighth plan), that this declining trend has been reversed. The eighth five year plan allocations of 4.9 per cent is equal to the fourth plan allocation in percentage terms, but is still much less than the proportion allocated in the first five year plan.' J. Tilak (1995) quoted in UNDP (1996).

manpower and materials were factors that contributed to the dismal situation. It was left to the state governments to remedy the situation. In states where there was political commitment (like Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu) schools functioned. Where education was not on the political agenda (like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), it deteriorated rapidly. Notwithstanding a declining resource allocation for education, the government appointed numerous commissions and committees to inquire into persistent illiteracy and wide male-female gaps. As a result, innumerable reports have been tabled in Parliament and discussed in the Planning Commission.

**I**t is evident (see box) that almost every conceivable strategy and approach has been covered in government policy. Policy documents recognise that the first stumbling block is poverty and that women from poor communities, especially in rural areas need special attention. In addition to the above, the Seventh and Eighth Five Year Plan documents recognised that national developmental and demographic goals cannot be achieved unless women's education is given priority. Strategies, starting from flexible school timings to decentralised planning and administration, have been recommended over and over again.

An administrator who had the opportunity to work in the education sector for almost two decades remarked that serious efforts were really never made to implement recurring recommendations pertaining to flexible school timings and appointing local people as teachers in primary schools. Some of these ideas were tried out in pockets, especially in Rajasthan through the Shiksha Karmi

4. J.P. Naik, *Education Commission and After*. Allied, New Delhi, 1982.

Project. Flexible timings were also experimented with in Madhya Pradesh and later in Lok Jumbish, Rajasthan. They have, however, remained essentially micro-level initiatives which were never integrated into the mainstream.

Though planning is national, effective implementation demands genuine decentralisation. Agricultural cycles, festivals and the monsoon vary across the country and even within each state. Decentralisation per se was never popular either among the politicians or the administrators. As a result, any policy contingent on decentralisation was never implemented and thus could not work. The grand old man of Indian education

J.P. Naik lamented, 'The political reasons to distrust schools, colleges and teachers ceased to exist (after Independence); but the educational elite that came to power replaced them by academic reasons... they had such poor opinion of the teachers and schools that they felt it necessary to continue the earlier policies of distrust on educational grounds and for maintaining standards. This was obviously a rationalisation to cover the innate love of power of the administrators and their inclination to continue status quo...' <sup>4</sup>

It is quite interesting that policy documents from the '80s onwards have not only accommodated the 'demands' of the women's move-

#### Recurring policy recommendations to promote girls education

- \* Schools within walking distance, closer to the place of dwelling, if necessary satellite schools for remote hamlets.
- \* Provide child-care facilities/crèche within school premises.
- \* Escort for girls, if school is away from the village or hamlet.
- \* Introduce flexible school timings and region-specific school calendar.
- \* Provide alternative modes/forms, combine formal with non-formal, condensed courses for dropouts, residential schools (ashram shalas) for special focus groups like nomadic tribes and others.
- \* Residential condensed education programme for adolescent girls and young women who dropped out of school or never enrolled (Mahila Shikshan Kendra).
- \* More women teachers in rural areas, with residential accommodation.
- \* Expand pool of women teachers by lowering qualifications, intensive training (near the place of dwelling), provide regular educational support, organise special condensed courses for dropouts who can be trained to work as teachers, provide secure accommodation for out-station teachers, and so on.
- \* Make curriculum relevant to the lives of poor women who are engaged in battle for survival.
- \* Recognise the problem of working children, provide special facilities.
- \* Introduce facilities for 'bridge programmes' to enable dropouts to re-enter the school system.
- \* Provide incentives such as uniforms, textbooks, exercise books, attendance scholarship and free bus passes.
- \* Involve the community in managing the school through advocacy, mobilisation and formation of village education committees with at least 50% women members.
- \* Improve quality of education, motivate teachers to make learning a joyful exercise.
- \* Decentralise educational planning and administration, bring it closer to people so that it reflects the special needs and aspirations of the community.
- \* Address management issues that inhibit the implementation of government policy, like grievance redressal, administrators and teachers union's resistance to flexible timings and school calendar, make teachers feel wanted and appreciated.
- \* Recruit women with lesser qualifications from rural areas, recruit local youth in remote areas where teacher absenteeism is rampant, appoint teachers to a specific school and so on.
- \* Mobilise public opinion for primary education and universal literacy in general and women's education in particular. Advocate for greater political will and administrative commitment. Make it a national mission with time-bound 'targets' — *a la* National Literacy Mission (NLM), National Elementary Education Mission (NEEM).

ment, but has simultaneously retained the early welfare orientation, the mother-wife-reproducer rhetoric and the women's empowerment approach. The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) launched in 1977 drew upon Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. The revised Programme of Action of 1992 talked about reproductive health even before it attracted wide attention during and after the Cairo conference of September 1994. Chapter I, paragraph 5.1 on Empowerment of Women proclaims GOI's commitment to 'enable women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health (especially reproductive health).'

Education policy documents clearly have kept pace with radical terminology from Freire and Illich in the '70s to the vocabulary of radical feminists in the '90s. Looking at the lucidity of education policy documents one cannot but note that as the situation got more grim on the ground, our policies became more radical.

**T**he 1986 National Policy on Education was hailed as a major breakthrough in addressing gender issues in government policy. The chapter titled Education for Women's Equality state: 'Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The national education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering.... The removal of women's illiteracy and ob-

stacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring...' (NPE, 1986)

**L**ike Indian political parties, policy documents dealing with women are a merry mixture of different approaches, views and ideologies, accommodating divergent (often contradictory) views within the same document.<sup>5</sup> They are essentially consensus documents. What is implemented, ignored or relegated to the status of a show-case is a political and administrative decision. It has little to do with what is sanctioned by policy. Policies are a set of guidelines, akin to the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution. People in positions of administrative or political authority are not mandated to implement them. They are, like international documents, formulated and publicised for a wide range of domestic and international reasons. Real decisions are taken at the time of preparation of action plans, projects or during budget allocations. This is a primary reason for the persistent gap between policy and action.

Take the 1986 National Policy on Education. Except for a paragraph or two in the section on vocational education, technical education and

5. During discussions on the first draft of this paper a few commentators pointed out that since the state is not a monolith and its policies are vague, flexible and self-contradictory, it provides space for innumerable small and big innovations in different parts of the country. India is a country of mind-boggling diversity and uneven development. The survival of democratic institutions has been possible because of the politics of accommodation of divergent view points. This is often cited as a positive feature that provided space for the coexistence of different approaches and strategies. On the other hand, ensuring visibility of gender issues in policy documents does not guarantee implementation.

early childhood care, the policy was silent on the gender dimension of educational access. The revised policy of 1992 states that the section on women's education is applicable to all aspects of educational planning and administration. After it was accepted by government, the section of women's education was implemented through a pilot project called Mahila Samakhya - Education for Women's Equality. This unique programme was nurtured and over a period of eight years it yielded interesting results. Soon, it became an accepted 'component' in some basic education projects. It was seen as an effective means to meet the gender check-list requirements of donors.

**H**owever, the lessons of the programme did not take root in the mainstream. While the importance of a special pilot project was appreciated, most advocates for women's education were disappointed that mainstream elementary education, technical education, schools and adult literacy remained unaffected. They carried on in a gender-blind way and special allocations were made for women beneficiaries. In effect, the policy was not implemented in spirit. In India, the irony is that innumerable pilot and micro-projects are initiated with a view to learn and apply generic principles on a wider scale. But despite the good intentions, pilot programmes remain isolated, as show pieces.

The response of civil society and agents of development has not been encouraging either. Barring traditional social reformers and missionaries,<sup>6</sup> universal elementary education has not been on the agenda of political movements of any shade, the women's movement, struggles of

6. Social reformers in the 19th and 20th century spearheaded efforts to establish educational institutions for women across the

dalit and tribal groups, communist inspired agrarian movements, or the trade unions. They have highlighted the plight of the poor, and the marginalised, argued for greater employment opportunities, supported affirmative action to reserve a certain percentage of jobs and seats in educational institutions. But universal elementary education has never been high on their political agenda.

Similarly, the non-government sector has a strange relationship with education. Non-formal and adult education centres have either been used as an 'entry point' for people's mobilisation or as a visible and continuous activity that generates goodwill. Advocacy and mobilisation for universal elementary education has rarely been on the agenda of most voluntary groups. There are exceptions of course, but by and large the alternative stream has paid as little attention to education as the mainstream.

Political parties in most parts of the country (with the possible exception of Kerala) have never pushed for education, not in the active way in which they mobilised and fought for reservations based on caste, community, tribe and so on. The media (both print and electronic) too has been remarkably silent about the outreach, quality and content of education, barring occasional, sporadic writing. The state of primary education, glaring inequalities in access to education and the prevalence of a wide gender gap has not grabbed media attention. So we have a situation where for almost five decades universal elementary education has not been a priority for

country. Their efforts have made a significant impact in various pockets across the country. Existence of islands of high female literacy in areas like Baroda in Gujarat or Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan was primarily due to the efforts of social reformers, philanthropy of enlightened business people and erstwhile royal families.

anyone. While everyone pays lip service to it, it has not captured the imagination of the nation. In an environment of apathy, is it surprising that women and girls education is the way it is. Promises, promises is all we ever get.

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# Select documents on girls and women's education

Pre-Independent India<sup>1</sup>

1854 Woods Dispatch: Recognised existence of male-female gap and called for encouragement of girls education.

1882 Indian Education Commission: Deplored backward condition of girls education, stressed the need to invest public funds to support education of girls and train more women as teachers.

1904 Government of India Education Resolution: Expressed anxiety over male-female disparity and called to spend more funds on girls education.

1919 Resolution of GOI: Reiterated need for more finances; to make education free for girls, in addition to scholarships and freeships.

1929 Hartog Committee: Pointed out the schism between boys and girls, emphasised the need for provision of secondary education for girls in order to increase the number of female teachers.

1944 The Post War Education Development Committee: Need not treat education of women as a special problem, as 'whatever is needed for boys and men, not less will be required for girls education.'



## Post-Independent India<sup>2</sup>

- 1950 The Constitution of India: Equal opportunities to all citizens irrespective of class, caste, religion, race and sex – free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14.
- 1951 First Five Year Plan: Neglect of women's education noted with concern. All co-education institutions were thrown open to girls. Emphasis on expansion of educational facilities.
- 1956 Second Five Year Plan 1956-61: Emphasis on need to provide greater opportunities to girls – efforts needed to educate parents on the importance of girls education. Shortage of women teachers recognised as a major bottleneck. Recommended centrally sponsored schemes which included:
- \* free accommodation for women teachers
  - \* appointment of school mothers
  - \* condensed course for adult women
  - \* stipend for women for teachers training
  - \* refresher courses
  - \* stipends for high-school students to take up teaching
  - \* attendance scholarships
  - \* exemption from tuition fee
  - \* construction of hostels for secondary school for girls.
- 1959 National Committee on Women's Education – under Chairpersonship of Durgabai Deshmukh:
- \* Education for women must be given special attention for at least some years to come and a special machinery should be created for it. Establish National Council for Women's Education;
  - \* special funds must be allotted in the various plan periods for furthering and developing this programme...provision of Rs 10 crore in addition to regular allocation;
  - \* this fund should be used for development of middle and secondary schools for girls, towards training institutions for women, for construction of hostels and staff quarters and for organising special educational facilities for adult women;
  - \* liberal grants should be given for education of women in rural areas.
- 1961 Third Five Year Plan 1961-66
- \* Women's education and training a major welfare strategy – primary objective: expand facilities for girls at various stages;
  - \* create conditions for encouraging parents to send their daughters to school – educating public opinion;
  - \* increase number of women teachers from rural areas, encourage urban women to go and teach in rural areas;
  - \* strategy to overcome shortage of science and women teachers – select promising students and assist them with scholarships and stipends;
  - \* community efforts to organise enrolment drives;
  - \* scheme of condensed courses through Central Social Welfare Board.
- 1962 Hansa Mehta Committee appointed by the NCWE 1962-64
- \* co-education adopted as a general pattern at the elementary stage.
  - \* need to induct women teachers in boys schools (especially at the secondary level) to encourage girls to join;
  - \* common curricula for boys and girls, with home science as a common core subject for both boys and girls at the middle stage.
- 1963 M. Bhaktavatsalam Committee to investigate the cause for lack of public support for girls education, particularly in rural areas.
- 'In our opinion the strategy for development of education of girls and women will have to take two forms, the first to emphasise the special programmes recommended by the National Committee on Women's Education. The second is to give attention to the education of girls at all stages and in all sectors as an integral part of the general programme for the expansion and improvement of education.'
- 1964 Indian Education Commission under chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari 1964-66: Commission took note of earlier recommendations and endorsed them. The main thrust of the report was on reducing inequalities and disparities – with the general observation that gender gap will close with overall expansion and improvement in educational facilities.<sup>3</sup> The commission *did not* have a separate chapter or section on girls and women's education, while it paid special attention to the education of scheduled castes and tribes.
- 1968 National Policy on Education
- Equality of educational opportunities was the main slogan of this policy. Education of girls should receive emphasis, not only on the grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation.<sup>4</sup>
- The concept of 'non-formal education' was introduced as a mechanism to enable out-of-school children to avail of educational opportunities. This

policy document, for the first time, addressed education of girls alongside that of scheduled castes and tribes.

1969 Fourth Five Year Plan 1969-74: Role of education to enable women to become better mothers and house managers received attention. Decreasing infant and maternal mortality, improving nutritional status of children and regulating family size were seen as the major benefits of women's education. For the first time such an instrumentalist approach to women's education was articulated in policy documents.

1974 13th Meeting of National Council for Women's Education

- \* Support to voluntary organisations and institutions for special projects for the improvement of women and girl's education;
- \* facilities and incentives to increase girls enrolment;
- \* condensed course for teachers training;
- \* encourage local girls to work as teachers in rural areas, after going through condensed teacher training course;
- \* part-time non-formal education for girls who drop out of school, prepare suitable curriculum for the same;
- \* establish women's polytechnics and ITI's;
- \* teachers quarters for women, with suitable security – twin quarters for women teachers and other women functionaries;
- \* involve Nehru Yuvak Kendra to cater to needs of women and girls through their network;

1974 Committee on the Status of Women in India

- \* Co-education adopted as a general policy at the primary level, it was noted that the quality of provisions in girls schools are inferior both in terms of physical infrastructure and teachers;
- \* free education for all girls up to the secondary stage;
- \* provision of primary schools within walking distance, establishment of ashram schools to serve clusters of villages; or peripatetic schools for girls who cannot attend formal schools, mobile schools for children of nomadic tribe;
- \* develop graded curriculum for the above;
- \* sustained mobilisation of public opinion and community support for creating a favourable environment for girls education;
- \* special incentives in low female enrolment areas;
- \* at least 50% teachers at the elementary level be

women;

- \* common core curriculum for boys and girls;
- \* provision of three years of pre-school education and special efforts to increase the number of balwadis;
- \* non-formal education for out-of-school girls and for women – literacy skills and familiarisation with democratic processes;
- \* equality of the sexes as a major value to be inculcated through the educational process. To this end, review of textbooks to scan them for content and presentation.

1975 Fifth Five Year Plan 1975-79

- \* The constitutional directive received prominence after two and a half decades;
- \* public recognition that UEE cannot become a reality unless gender gap is closed;
- \* national Adult Education Programme and Integrated Child Development Services launched.

1980 Sixth Five Year Plan 1980-85

Separate chapter on women and development, noted with alarm the decline in sex ratio and it stressed on women's role in development. Emphasis on economic upliftment through income generation and employment opportunities.

Focus shifted from provision of more schools (supply side) to socio-economic reasons for women's lack of access to education.

UEE would be specially directed towards higher enrolment and retention of girls in schools; (especially in nine educationally backward states) through the following interventions:

- \* Provision of balwadis attached to schools for sibling care;
- \* income generating programme for girls after school hours to supplement family income;
- \* expansion of incentive scheme like free uniforms, text-books and mid-day meals;
- \* appointment of women teachers in rural areas; and
- \* strengthening science teaching in girls schools and colleges to enable their participation.

1985 Seventh Five Year Plan 1985-90

Influence of International Decade of Women, removed the Department of Women and Child Development from the Ministry of Welfare and placed it in the newly created Ministry of Human Resource Development – along with education, culture and youth and sports.

Moved away from viewing family as the basic unit of development and addressed intra-household distribution of resources; making rural women

visible by highlighting their economic contribution in agriculture, animal husbandry, etc.

In education, no major departure from the past.

- 1986 National Policy on Education and Programme of Action: Added a new dimension to the education debate by calling for education to become an instrument for fostering equality between men and women. Introduced separate chapter in the policy. 'Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women....'

'The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting of time-targets, and effective monitoring....'

- 1988 Shram Shakti – Report of the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector. Recommendations:

- \* It is necessary that there should be shifts for girls at suitable times so that they can assist their mothers in work and go to school.'

- \* A woman helper is provided... for accompanying the children from the house and back to ensure their enrolment and safety;

- \* the helper's services should be utilised for looking after the siblings below school going age of the girls... in the school premises itself;

- \* regular crèches attached to primary schools;

- \* incentives... cash per month and free uniforms, text books and exercise books to all girls at least up to the primary school level;

- \* syllabi need to be made more relevant for children of rural areas. Practical subjects like animal husbandry, cattle care, soil conservation, agriculture and social forestry may be added and such options offered along with subjects like history, modern science and physics;

- \* condensed courses... for adolescent girls and above... to appear in same examinations for which children from public schools from metropolitan cities also appear;

- \* possible to have more women teachers only if they are posted in their home villages or nearby villages;

- \* to enhance pool of women teachers in rural areas, provide '...intensive training for a period

of one year or nine months... their training and boarding and lodging should be free';

- \* revision of textbooks and primers needs to be carried out keeping the objectives of bringing women into greater focus;

- \* combine general and vocational education to cater to the vast majority of labouring women in poverty. '...these alternatives of education need to be developed in a decentralised manner... need for revolving fund from which they (girls/women) may be given scholarships.'

- \* Mobilisation of the community to convince parents of poor girls regarding the relevance of education.

- \* Recognition that 'literacy in itself is not a solution to the basic problem of poor women, viz. exploitation and hunger, and therefore literacy has to be understood in the wider context of the social structure.'

- 1992 Revised National Policy on Education and Programme of Action: The chapter on Education for Women's Equality was brought forward from being IV in the 1986 POA to Chapter I in the 1992 POA – with the following rider – 'Education for Women's Equality is too important to be left to the individual proclivities of persons in charge of implementing programmes. It should be incumbent on all actors, agencies and institutions in the field of education at all levels to be gender sensitive and ensure that women have their rightful share in all educational programmes and activities.'

## Vimala Ramachandran

### Endnotes

1. Usha Nayar, *Universal Primary Education of Rural Girls in India*. NCERT, New Delhi, 1991.

2. Sources: Nayar (1993), Naik (1982), GOI (1974), GOI (1986), GOI (1988) and GOI (1992).

3. It is noteworthy that the first major commission set up by GOI did not feel the need to sharply focus on girls education and inherent gender inequalities in educational access. This is symptomatic of that era when it was believed that unequal access to education of certain castes, communities and of women will be bridged if there is a general expansion of educational opportunities. J.P. Naik, who was the architect of the 1968 Policy observed, 'On the social side, the education of girls has continued to progress at a faster rate than that of boys throughout the post-Independence period. The gap between the education of boys and girls at all stages had therefore decreased considerably between 1947 and 1977...' J.P. Naik, *The Education Commission and After*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1982.

4. Usha Nayar, (1993).

# Extract

## Human Development in South Asia 1998

We are born weak, we need strength; helpless, we need aid; foolish, we need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man's estate, is the gift of education.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
(1712-1778)

THE challenge for the South Asia region today is to travel the vast distance between its performance and its promise. On the one hand, it has emerged as the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished, and the least gender-sensitive region in the world – as documented in the 1997 Report on Human Development in South Asia. On the other, it has all the potential to become the most dynamic region in the twenty-first century if there is massive investment in human development. The most critical components in any such investment plan are: (a) basic education for all, and (b) relevant technical skills. This is the main theme of this second Report.

South Asia can learn a great deal from the development strategies followed in recent decades by Japan, the East Asian industrializing tigers, and China. A firm basis for equitable growth was laid by massive investment in basic education for all, combined with great emphasis on technical education. The education strategy pursued by these countries was the key not only to accelerating economic growth but to distributing resources more equitably and to empowering people. It is well to remember this lesson in the midst

of the present temporary financial problems of East Asia, since the basic foundations of East Asia's economic prosperity – particularly human and social capital – are still intact, and these will prove vital in rescuing the region from the current liquidity crisis.

It was through human development strategies that a major breakthrough was made by Japan in the 1940s and 1950s; by the East Asian industrializing tigers (the Republic of Korea, former Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand) in the 1960s and 1970s; and by China in the 1980s and 1990s. As low wages were raised through greater economic prosperity, and as the early increases in labour productivity slowed down, it was but natural that development leadership passed on gradually from Japan to East Asia to China. The earlier development leaders had to restructure their economies to adapt to high-tech, high-wage development models.

In this gradual shift of economic frontiers, South Asia is well-positioned to assume leadership in the next phase for a development model based on low wages, high labour productivity, and massive export of low-tech consumer goods. But it must engineer a major investment in human development, particularly in basic education and relevant technical skills.

The educational challenge in South Asia has become formidable because of earlier neglect: 395 million illiterate adults, out of which 60 per cent are women; 50 million out-of-school children; only 1.5 per cent enrolment in vocational and technical schools at the secondary level, compared to fifteen times that per-

\* The Overview is reproduced courtesy the Human Development Centre, Islamabad. The Report will be released in New Delhi on 4 April 1998.

centage in Latin America; and only one scientist for every 10,000 people, compared to four times that number in East Asia. South Asia has by now the lowest adult literacy rate (49 per cent) in the world. It has fallen behind Sub-Saharan Africa (57 per cent literacy rate), even though in 1970 South Asia was ahead with a literacy rate of 32 per cent, compared to 27 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The economic and social costs of such neglect of education in South Asia are simply enormous. Whenever and wherever basic education was spread, the social and economic benefits were quite dramatic and visible. There is considerable evidence of these benefits cited in the Report (see chapter 2). For instance:

- \* In urban India, when mothers were uneducated, the child mortality rate was as high as 82 per thousand, but it dropped sharply to 34 per thousand when mothers were educated.

- \* In Bangladesh, contraceptive use was only 27 per cent for women with no education but increased to 66 per cent for women with more than secondary education.

- \* In Pakistan, a recent study has estimated that its per capita GDP in 1985 would have been 25 per cent higher if, in 1960, it had Indonesia's primary school enrolment rates.

- \* In Nepal, increasing the average education of a farmer by one year expanded agricultural output by 5.2 per cent in the Terai region and by 5.9 per cent in the Hill region.

- \* In India, increasing average primary schooling of the work force by one year increased output by 23 per cent.

- \* In Sri Lanka, high female literacy (87 per cent) has contributed to a decline in the rate of population growth to only 1.3 per cent a year.

Thus, there is clear evidence from South Asia's own experience, backed up by the experiences of other regions, that education leads to many social benefits, including improvements in standards of hygiene, reduction in infant and child mortality rates, decline in population growth rates, increase in labour productivity, rise in civic consciousness, greater political empowerment and democratization, and an improved sense of national unity. The benefits of education are comparatively easy to document: the losses suffered by South Asia from a continuing neglect of education can only be inferred and are difficult to quantify. It is quite certain, however, that South Asian economies cannot hope to engineer a decisive breakthrough in development or to become industrializing tigers of the future without a generous investment in basic education and technical skills.

The recent experience of South Asia, however, offers some hope and encouragement. The net enrolment rate in primary schools has already reached nearly 80 per cent. Even if over-age children (between 13 to 18 years) are included, only one-third of the children are out of school at present. Adult literacy has increased by almost 50 per cent since 1970, from 32 per cent to 49 per cent. Female literacy and school enrolment have increased much faster than male literacy between 1970 and 1995, thereby reducing the prevailing gender disparities. The South Asian countries are now beginning to allocate more resources for education: education expenditure has increased from 2.0 per cent of GNP in 1960 to 3.5 per cent in 1994.

The experience in some parts of South Asia has been extremely encouraging. Sri Lanka and the Maldives have already achieved over 90 per cent adult literacy rate and near universal primary school enrolment. Bangladesh is beginning to make rapid strides in school enrolment, particularly through the vigorous efforts of its civil organizations. Some states in India, such as Kerala, have already attained a very high rate of adult literacy and primary school enrolment.

Moreover, these experiences have demonstrated that poverty of national income is no barrier to the spread of basic education. For instance, several poorer states within India have managed to achieve higher levels of education than their richer counterparts: Kerala, with a per capita income of \$1017 (in 1993 PPP dollars), has literacy rate of 90 per cent, compared to 58 per cent in Punjab which has more than double the per capita income of Kerala. International comparisons also bear this out. For example, Vietnam, with a per capita income of \$1208 (in 1994 PPP dollars), has attained an adult literacy rate of 94 per cent, while India (per capita income of \$1348) had 52 per cent literacy and Pakistan (per capita income of \$2154) is even further behind, with 38 per cent literacy. Indeed, while income is important, it is not decisive. What is decisive is the political commitment behind the many education campaigns within South Asia—a commitment that has remained both faint and fragile so far.

It is within this context that we need to review the educational challenge that lies ahead of South Asia in the coming decades. South Asia's policy planners must reduce the educational challenge in front of them to certain manageable tasks. When too much needs to be done, a sharper focus on priority issues is absolutely essential. These issues can be crystallized into six major tasks.

First, the quantitative challenge is clear (see chapters 3 and 4). There are at least 50 million children who

have not seen the inside of a school. To this backlog of primary school age and over-age children, another 2.2 million children in the school-going age group are being added each year because of population growth. If universal primary enrolment is to be attained within the next five years, school facilities must be created for an additional 65 million children. If the target is to be attained over a longer period, the annual challenge can be reduced even further but the economic and social costs of lack of education will keep accumulating. Each South Asian nation will have to decide for itself, in the light of its own circumstances, how it goes about the task of achieving universal primary enrolment in the shortest possible time. Let us remember at the same time that the internationally-agreed goal at the Jomtien Conference in 1990 was to achieve basic education for all (EFA) by the year 2000. Over 100 countries have already set up their specific EFA goals and plans and are steadfastly moving towards them (see box 3.6). South Asian nations cannot afford to lose this race for education for all.

In addition to the challenge of providing schooling for out-of-school children and new entrants, South Asia faces a huge backlog of 395 million illiterate adults. Some South Asian countries have launched ambitious adult literacy programmes. In terms of national priorities, however, the most urgent task is to educate the new generation of children, rather than trying to rescue the past. If financial resources and administrative energies are limited—as indeed they are—they are best spent on providing universal primary education to all those children who are ultimately going to shape the future of these nations.

Second, the quality and relevance of basic education needs to be improved dramatically (see chapter 5). The levels of student learning achievement in South Asia are startlingly low. Several surveys have documented the poor quality of schooling in South Asia—including an irrelevant curriculum, the limited availability of textbooks and other learning materials, and the poor quality of teaching. Some recent studies have analysed the huge gap between the learning achievements of South and East Asian students. A fundamental reason is that it is not enough to get all the children into schools: they need an effective system of education as well.

Other negative results of the poor quality of primary education are high rates of drop-out and repetition in South Asia. Only 59 per cent of primary level students complete their studies. This means that over 40 per cent of the investment in primary school educa-

tion is wasted. Achieving universal primary completion is as important as universal primary enrolment.

Third, teachers are the most important resource for ensuring high quality primary education. Unfortunately, South Asia has only 66 per cent of the total number of teachers that are actually needed (see chapter 8). This leads to very high pupil-teacher ratios: for example, 64:1 in India, 71:1 in Bangladesh. This implies that, even if teachers were always present and actively teaching during school hours, they could give, on average, less than one hour to each child every month.

The problem is further aggravated since one-sixth of the teachers are untrained. The limited teacher training offered is fairly rudimentary, giving teachers little understanding of the material they have to teach. Most have completed less than 10 years of schooling themselves. They have often not studied core subjects, such as mathematics and the language of instruction, beyond grade 8 or 10. To make matters worse, many teachers turn up in schools—particularly government-run schools—only to pick up their monthly pay cheques: for instance, teacher absenteeism is as high as 42 per cent in the Indian state of Assam.

At the primary level there are few female teachers in most countries: 25 per cent in Pakistan, 27 per cent in Bangladesh, 31 per cent in India. Sri Lanka is a notable exception, with 82 per cent female teachers. There is considerable evidence that primary school enrolment and completion rates and achievement levels—particularly for girls—are higher when teachers are females.

There is poor motivation for most teachers because of an inadequate salary structure, poor working conditions, and a lack of advancement opportunities. Teacher salaries in many countries are lower than those paid to cooks or chauffeurs. Many schools have no electricity, no proper class-rooms, nor even a chair for the teacher.

Fundamental reforms are needed to provide more and better teachers in the schools of South Asia, and to create proper facilities and motivation for them to teach the next generation.

Fourth, gender gaps are large and persistent at every level of education in South Asia (see chapter 6). At the primary level, net enrolment of girls is only 69 per cent, compared to 88 per cent for boys. At the secondary level, generally half as many girls are being enrolled as boys. South Asia's female literacy rate of 36 per cent is the lowest among all regions of the world: it is much lower than the average for the developing world (62 per cent) and compares poorly with 48 per

cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 95 per cent in East Asia (excluding China). South Asia has 243 million illiterate women today – two-thirds of the region's adult female population and 45 per cent of the world's total illiterate women.

The challenge for South Asian planners is to remove all gender disparities, particularly in new enrolment, since it has been amply documented that investment in girls' education is by far the best investment (see box 6.2). In order to address this issue effectively, policy-makers must understand the basic reasons why gender gaps persist. Two reasons, of course, are widespread poverty and cultural biases, so that many families give preference to the education of sons rather than daughters, whenever there is limited family income. This means that scholarship programmes are more urgently needed for girls, as is borne out by the experience of the Female Education Scholarship Programme in Bangladesh (see Box 6.5). There are many other factors inhibiting girls' enrolment which are more amenable to thoughtful policy action, such as lack of conveniently located schools, inflexible hours, non-availability of female teachers, absence of single-sex schools, irrelevant curricula, and inadequate school facilities (particularly the absence of toilet facilities). There are several experiences which show a dramatic expansion in girls' enrolment once these supply-side constraints are overcome.

Fifth, vocational and technical education programmes in South Asia are often inadequate, irrelevant, and qualitatively poor (see chapter 7). Less than 2 per cent of children in the relevant age group at the secondary school level are enrolling for technical education in South Asia, compared to over 10 per cent in East Asia. Not only is enrolment low, about half of the students drop-out before completing their studies. Moreover, the skills taught in many technical schools are often inappropriate for the job market.

Many graduates of polytechnics and vocational schools fail to land any worthwhile jobs. For instance, approximately one hundred thousand technical school graduates in India are either unemployed or underemployed at present. The placement rate for the formal training programmes in Bangladesh is as low as 30 per cent. South Asia faces a perplexing dilemma. It is producing so few technically trained people and yet about half of them remain unemployed.

The prominent features of vocational and technical education in South Asia are: low student enrolment, high drop-out, inadequate budgetary allocation, low quality of teachers, inequitable access for women

and those in rural areas, limited role for the private sector and NGOs, and very limited facilities for training in modern technologies. The improvements needed are obvious. They revolve around three main issues: (i) enhancing the social and economic acceptability of technical education and increasing the demand for such education (e.g., elevating technical diplomas to the status of general education degrees); (ii) better manpower planning, especially guidance to students concerning job market requirements; and (iii) refocusing vocational and technical education on more appropriate technologies of the future, with a special focus on skills needed for expanding domestic and global markets.

\* Sixth, South Asia needs to allocate sufficient resources for education and to spend them on the right education priorities. Overall, South Asia is spending 3.5 per cent of its GNP on education, compared to 4.3 per cent in East Asia, 5.5 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 5.5 per cent in the Arab States. The negative impact of these low financial commitments is made worse by the persistent neglect of some priority areas of education, such as basic education, girls' education, and vocational and technical training. In South Asia, education budgets are generally distorted in favour of higher general education, which, normally the private sector should provide. The bias in the South Asian region in favour of colleges and universities greatly squeezes the financial budgets for basic education. In 1994, primary education received only 47 per cent of the total budgetary allocation in South Asia, compared to 70 per cent in East Asia during their initial phase of development.

Not only are the financial allocations low and for the wrong priorities, the efficiency of educational spending is also very low. The high drop-out and repetition rates imply that over 40 per cent of the investment in education is wasted. And when nearly half of those educated do not find jobs, and when thousands of highly-trained persons migrate to foreign lands every year (see box 3.4), it is evident that South Asia is getting a poor return from its education spending.

There has been some increase in the education budgets of South Asia in recent years. This has been supported by a major increase in external assistance in the post-Jomtien period, particularly for primary education. For instance, the World Bank's total lending for education has increased from \$78 million in 1984-88 to \$424 million by 1995, with the share of primary education increasing from 5 per cent in 1970-74 to 30 per cent in 1990-95.

If South Asia is to provide universal primary education within a reasonable period of time, say the next five years, it must fund more adequate education budgets, finance the right education priorities, improve its low efficiency of education spending, as well as mobilize sufficient external assistance. This theme is discussed in the next section.

Considerable time has already been lost by South Asian leaders for fulfilling the commitment made at the Jomtien Conference in 1990 to extend basic education for all by the year 2000. This now seems a virtual impossibility – particularly in the more populous countries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which together contain 98 per cent of the out-of-school children in the region.

The Report presents a concrete and realistic five year plan (1999-2003) which can ensure basic education for all the children of South Asia by the year 2003 (see chapter 10). This plan is inspired by the actual experience of several developing countries – including Zimbabwe (see box 10.4) and Cambodia – which have attained such a target within a 3 to 5 years period by ensuring a firm political commitment, a heroic national effort, and a clear financial strategy. A seven-point strategy is proposed in the Report to achieve universal primary education within a period of five years and to produce sufficient technical skills for job markets:

1. *Preparing a concrete five year plan for enrolling all children:* The first step is to prepare a concrete five year plan (1999-2003) to extend universal basic education. The Report presents an illustrative plan for all South Asian countries. The main features of this plan are:

- \* Schooling facilities will need to be extended to about 65 million additional children during the next five years, to provide for both existing out-of-school children and for the new entrants in the primary school-age group.

- \* About 2 million additional teachers will need to be trained rapidly. For this purpose, these countries can draw upon several options – including the considerable reservoir of educated unemployed; drafting of university students for one or two years into a national literacy corps; use of educated people in the army and voluntary services of retired educated people, particularly in villages.

- \* The total recurrent cost for this emergency campaign for primary education is estimated at \$5.75 billion, or around \$1.15 billion a year over the next five years. This cost works out at the rate of \$30 per child per year, which conforms to international experience. This additional cost is no more than 0.3 per cent of the com-

bined GNP of South Asia during the next five years, and – even when capital costs are included – is less than one per cent of GNP.

- \* While these magnitudes refer to the overall situation in South Asia, the challenge is naturally different in different countries depending on their existing performance. There is hardly any additional effort required in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, which have already achieved near-universality in primary education. On the other hand, the challenge is quite formidable in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

## 2. *Establishing an effective education system:*

The key need in South Asia is not just to bring all children to school but to improve the ability of these schools to teach children effectively. This is a challenge that all countries in the region have yet to meet. The report suggests several straightforward actions that would go a long way in improving school quality and enhancing learning achievement (chapter 5):

- \* simplify the curriculum structure, and reduce the number of subjects taught in primary classes;

- \* combine textbook provision with appropriate teacher guides and training;

- \* develop a better infrastructure for distributing textbooks effectively;

- \* introduce locally-determined and flexible school hours in formal schools to reduce student absenteeism;

- \* devise incentive mechanisms – such as local housing for teachers and free school meals for children – to encourage higher teacher and student attendance.

Teachers must be at the centre of any plan for raising school quality. The Report proposes nine strategies that could have high pay-offs in improving teacher performance (chapter 8):

- \* reduce class sizes in crowded urban areas to ensure that the teachers spend more time on their tasks – an additional 2.05 million teachers will be required in the next five years to reduce class size to a pedagogically acceptable level of 40;

- \* raise the minimum level of pre-service general education for all new primary school teachers;

- \* improve teacher training standards by hiring qualified trainers with primary school teaching experience;

- \* emphasize relevant teaching skills in pre-service and in-service teacher education, and make more training school-based;

- \* raise the status of primary teaching by improving working conditions and creating a performance-based career structure for teachers within the primary school level;

- \* increase the share of female teachers to at least 50 per cent so as to raise girls' enrolment rates and reduce



drop-out. This will require approximately three-fourths of the additional teachers to be female in the next five years;

- \* hire more teachers from the local community;
- \* introduce mechanisms for effective community monitoring of teaching standards;
- \* learn from the innovative teacher training and empowerment methods used by NGOs in South Asia and around the world.

3. *Mobilizing political support*: Preparation of a sound, realistic, technocratic plan is only the beginning of the exercise. What is far more important is to mobilize full political support behind it. The goal of basic education for all should be presented to the nation as a firm political commitment, as a target worthy of the whole-hearted support of the entire nation, and as a priority objective for which adequate finances will be provided. Political leaders can express their commitment to the goal of universal primary education in many ways, including making it an integral part of their party manifestos, adopting it as a bipartisan goal through a resolution of the parliament, advocating it aggressively through the media, and by mobilizing the full support of influential opinion-makers in the community. From experience, it appears that the following steps may be of particular help:

- \* a compulsory primary education law must be enacted and strictly enforced. Such laws already exist in most South Asian countries but their enforcement leaves much to be desired (see box 5.2);
- \* the organizational structure of managing primary education must be decentralized, with considerable autonomy delegated to local bodies and grassroot organizations. At the centre, full political support should be provided to this nation-wide effort, with the heads of government giving their whole-hearted and constant support to the education goals that have been set. It is useful to pass bipartisan resolutions in the parliament to endorse the national education objectives and goals and to make it clear that their achievement is a national obligation, over and above any narrow political considerations;
- \* another powerful measure is to make a constitutional provision that funds for attaining the goal of universal primary education will be treated as the 'first claim' on budgetary resources. Ideally, the parliament should pass a bill that at least 5 per cent of GNP will be earmarked for education and then it should ensure each year that such a provision is protected from erosion, despite the inevitable budget crises from time to time.

These steps can help reaffirm the political commitment to the goal of basic education for all. But let it be stated clearly that political commitment is not a matter of a few concrete steps: it is a matter of deep convictions. When such convictions are missing, brilliant technocratic blueprints may not produce any tangible results.

4. *Promoting non-formal education*: In order to make the financial targets more feasible and to ensure successful implementation of education programmes at the grassroot level, it is essential to involve local communities in the design, implementation, and monitoring of these programmes. Without community ownership, basic education for all will always remain an elusive goal. That is why the Report argues that any plan to extend universal primary education by the year 2003 will not succeed unless major emphasis is placed on non-formal education (see chapter 9).

The real essence of non-formal education is community mobilization and participation. Successful programmes meet the demands of the local community rather than of central planners. They are designed not by top policy-makers but by the people themselves. They are planned not from above but from below.

There are several distinguishing features of non-formal education; for example, flexible hours, location of schools nearer to children, selection of teachers from within the local community, a participatory and life-related curriculum, focus on girls and under-privileged groups, and community participation (particularly parental interest) in all phases of education.

As a consequence, non-formal schools are cost-effective. For example, in Pakistan, a non-formal school costs less than 2 per cent of the capital costs of a formal school and it takes only one month to start in a make-shift building or a room in the house of the local teacher, compared to an average 2 year start-up time for a formal school in a new building. The unit cost per student of running a non-formal school is generally one-third to one-half that of a formal school. Greater efficiency in education spending is ensured by greatly reducing drop-out and repetition rates. The quality of education in these non-formal schools is normally as good, or even better, than in formal schools. Non-formal education is not the second-best option: often it is the only option for resource-strapped economies and it generally produces high-quality graduates. The Report mentions many successful experiments in South Asian countries (see boxes 9.3 to 9.12) where NGOs and civil society initiatives are making a difference. However, the scale of these initiatives is still quite

small and there is a major need for designing new partnerships between the governments and the community-based organizations.

It is also necessary to mobilize the energies and resources of the business community for the goal of basic education for all. Any donations or endowments for education can be declared tax-free. Liberal concessions given to industrialists can be linked with their contribution to educating their workers and others in the neighbouring community. For those industrial firms which employ children, a framework can be designed wherein children work for only a limited number of hours and it becomes the duty of the employers to provide them with education facilities for the remaining time.

In order to achieve basic education for all within the next five years, there is an urgent need to forge innovative partnerships between the government, NGOs, local communities, and business organizations. Governments should adopt many of the distinguishing features of non-formal education within their own education programmes. They should, at the same time, rely on the devotion and commitment of local NGOs and grassroot organizations while allocating their education budgets. A successful model is for the government to finance, set standards, and monitor education programmes, while leaving actual implementation to NGOs and local communities.

*5. Removing all gender disparities:* One of the most important features of any plan to provide basic education for all has to be its firm resolve to remove all gender disparities. The Jomtien Declaration (1990) was quite specific on this point: *'the most urgent policy is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women.'*

The Report presents a seven-point agenda for accelerating girls' education and for eliminating gender disparities (see chapter 6). The agenda suggests that:

- \* compulsory primary education laws must be enacted and penalties for non-enrolment of girls should be as severe as for non-enrolment of boys;
- \* grants given for education by the central government to provincial/state governments or by various governments to NGOs should contain a provision that the amount of the grant be reduced by the extent of disparity that prevails in the enrolment of girls and boys.
- \* supply-side constraints should be overcome: for example, by locating schools within easy reach of the community; by maintaining flexible hours; by establishing single-sex schools if so desired by the community; and by offering scholarships to girls students to

compensate their families for loss of their economic work at home;

\* the provision of more female teachers is a critical factor. The proportion of female teachers should be raised from the present 31 per cent to at least 50 per cent in the next five years.

\* community participation in planning and managing schools should be increased;

\* concrete steps must be taken to enhance the overall status of women in society.

*6. Building relevant technical skills:* As mentioned earlier, less than 2 per cent of secondary school children in South Asia opt for technical education. They are often badly trained, by poorly qualified teachers, in technologies which are not well-suited for the job market. The Report presents a bold plan for fundamental reform (see chapter 7). It stresses that firm political commitment and the universalization of primary education are the two essential pillars for any major revamping of vocational and technical education. Given these foundations, the key elements in a comprehensive programme of reform are:

- \* ensure equivalency of degrees from technical institutes and general education universities;
- \* make technical education part and parcel of secondary education;
- \* undertake comprehensive surveys and tracer studies to link technical training to the requirements of the job market;
- \* change the skill composition of technical training to reflect the demand for newer, more modern technologies;
- \* extend the coverage of vocational and technical education to hitherto neglected groups and regions – particularly, women and rural areas;
- \* persuade the private sector, especially the business community, through special tax incentives to provide relevant technical skills; and
- \* mobilize adequate budgetary support, including foreign assistance, for building up the technological capability of the nation.

*7. Mobilising adequate financial resources:* In order to formulate a realistic financial strategy, the main focus should be on the reallocation of existing budgets. Mobilization of additional resources, while necessary, is more difficult. But there is considerable scope for restructuring existing budgetary allocations in South Asia including the following measures:

- \* current military spending levels are quite high, particularly in India and Pakistan, who together spend over \$12 billion a year on defence. This expenditure can be

considerably reduced if current negotiations towards a constructive détente succeed, and if there is a peaceful settlement of all outstanding disputes. If military spending levels are cut by 5 per cent a year over the next five years, it could release about \$22 billion in a peace dividend – over four times what is required for the goal of universal primary education within the next five years. Even just a freeze on military spending levels in current prices will release more than enough resources to attain the universal primary education target;

- \* South Asian countries can free themselves from the burden of expensive domestic debts by privatizing their public assets. These domestic debts consume 5 to 6 per cent of their GNP, which can be spent instead on balancing budgets and on greater provision for social services, including education. The current pace of privatization in South Asia is among the slowest in the world. The longer the privatization process takes, the more opportunities these countries will lose in balancing their budgets and in implementing their social agendas;

- \* there must be a major restructuring of existing allocation priorities in the education budgets of South Asia, with the bulk of finances devoted to basic education, girls' education, and vocational and technical training. The current bias in favour of higher education must be reversed: private initiatives should be encouraged to provide high-quality university education, with liberal state scholarships and loans for deserving students who cannot afford the fees of private institutions. At least 70 per cent of education budget allocations should be earmarked for primary education;

- \* foreign donors should be requested to allocate a higher percentage of their existing aid funds to education, particularly basic education and technical training. At present, only 9 per cent of external assistance to South Asia is allocated for human priority needs (basic education, primary health care, nutrition, safe drinking water, and family planning services), which is less than half of what needs to be done in the spirit of the 20:20 compact endorsed at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. If South Asian economies are willing to devote more of their own resources and efforts to the goal of basic education for all, it would be quite realistic to expect the international community to support these efforts;

- \* a number of innovative methods can also be used to provide adequate funding for the goal of universal primary education. Some countries have resorted to special levies earmarked for education spending. The Republic of Korea, for instance, imposed a special five-

year tax on alcohol, tobacco, interest payments, and the financial sector in its 1982 national budget. Within five years, this tax accounted for 15 per cent of the education budget and its duration was later extended by a further five year period. Brazil has imposed a 2.5 per cent salary tax on the wages of employees in the private sector and specifically channels these resources towards primary education. Nepal, Philippines, China, and Botswana also have special levies for education. Pakistan levied a special *Iqra* surcharge on all imports to raise substantial revenues for education but, unfortunately, the revenue proceeds were not separated from the general budget and therefore never earmarked specifically for education. As such, an imaginative initiative did not lead to the promised results;

- \* another innovative mechanism for addressing the twin concerns of high external debt servicing and low education spending is 'debt for social development' swaps. Debt swaps have retired so far over \$750 million of foreign debt owed by developing countries. Unfortunately, South Asia has not been a beneficiary of such swaps even though the region's external debt exceeds \$150 billion. If South Asian governments improve their fiscal management and overall economic governance, they will be in a position to negotiate such 'debt for social development swaps.'

The goal of universal basic education can and must be achieved over the next five years. Similarly, imparting relevant technical skills should become a top priority objective on government agendas. As the foregoing discussion shows, a realistic technocratic plan can always be prepared and a concrete financial strategy always designed. The missing ingredient in South Asian countries has been the political will. The real question is: is it possible to confront the political leaders of South Asia with the tragic consequences on continued neglect of education and excite them at the same time about the promise and the potential of a major breakthrough in the next five years?

South Asia is challenging its policy-makers today to unleash the creative potential of one quarter of humanity. Extending basic education for all and creating relevant technical skills are the keys to meeting this challenge. South Asia is fast approaching an historic watershed. It can realize the promise of a new dawn in the twenty-first century. Or it can disintegrate into anarchy and confusion. 'Human history,' as H.G. Wells remarked a few decades ago, 'becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.' The Report analyses this choice in the context of South Asia as objectively and as honestly as possible.

# A dialogue

THE significance of education in the development of human potential needs no elaboration. Neither does India's poor performance in the area of basic education. To understand the problems and to generate effective remedies, the Centre for Civil Society organized a Dialogue on Education on 22 February 1998. Professor Arun Kumar of JNU spoke on higher education, Dr. Parth J. Shah of the Centre dealt with primary education, and Dr. Surjit Bhalla of Oxus Research and Investments offered his views on education in general. Professors Jandhyala B.G. Tilak and N.V. Varghese of the National Institute for Education Planning and Administration (NIEPA) commented on the presentations.

**Arun Kumar:** I'll speak primarily about higher education, based largely on the report prepared by the JNU Teachers' Association, 'Teachers' Perspective on Reforming Higher Education in India.' The Rastogi Committee Report has proposed certain structural changes in higher education. It is the duty of the people involved in higher education to outline what they think is important to improve higher education. If they don't do it, somebody else will. I feel that the debate among academics has declined, both within and across institutions. Even within departments, there is little interaction. But we need to engage each other and society.

Given the demands generated by globalization, we need to introduce substantial changes in higher education; incremental changes will not do. Higher education is all about teaching and research, which requires a higher order of creativity compared to almost any other profession. Creativity of a high order cannot be achieved by diktats either from vice-chancellors or department heads, neither can it be achieved by external inducements like higher salaries. A high degree of internal motivation and autonomy is needed. Role of incentives is rather limited in enhancing performance of academics. Relative salaries are nonetheless important, not for those already in academia, but for those who are deciding to enter the teaching profession. The current skewed salary structure leads to enormous waste. Half of the MA students, for example, leave for

an MBA, or bank or IAS exams, or studies abroad. So do PhD students. This demoralizes students as well as faculty and leads to a brain drain – to the private sector and abroad.

Education is a merit good. Government must subsidize it. We need more, not less, higher education. We still do not know how knowledge is produced; it is a shotgun approach. The more we do, the higher the chances that something good will come out. It is true that if the state provides subsidies, it will try to control education. So autonomy of universities is important, and autonomy could be preserved only if long-term, and not short-term, performance evaluations are undertaken. Higher education's critical role is opposition of vested interests in society – it should critique society and the state. And that role can be assessed only in the long run.

With autonomy comes accountability. If society is going to subsidize, then higher education must be accountable to it. But only autonomous universities, departments, and individuals can provide accountability in the long run. A strong peer group within the country is necessary to build accountability. The notion of discipline in higher education is different from that in other areas. The essence of higher education is dissent, but in most other institutional structures dissent is disobedience. Think of a typical bureaucracy – the army. So we must first remove bureaucratic hierarchy from within higher education. Who needs the distinctions of assistant, associate, and full professor? It doesn't improve internal motivation, and besides, people engage in all kinds of manipulations to get to the higher level. Peer group of autonomous individuals must perform the function of maintaining discipline in higher education.

In India, there are three types of academics: one, the so-called 'good' academic; two, the bureaucrat academic; and three, the independent academic. Western standards are used to judge 'good' academics – number of conferences attended abroad, number of papers published, where they received their PhDs. Their peer group is abroad and not in India. Their research priorities are dictated not by the needs of the country but by

the allure of visiting professorships. The bureaucrat type sits on committees and commissions and wields enormous power. The independent academic is squeezed between the two. Often the bureaucrat academic points to the 'good' academic and discriminates against the independent academic. So what we need is a high degree of autonomy and individuality to meet the challenge of higher education.

**Parth J. Shah:** Let's move from higher education to primary education. I'll first develop a model that provides good primary education by comparing two states in India. I'll then extend the model and outline three criteria that any reform proposal must meet.

Table 1 gives some data about education in two states. (All data is from the NSSO 1991, 1993 and NCAER 1994; see also Tilak, *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 1996. The data is for the years 1986-87 and 1991-92.) State B is one of the few states in the country where elementary education is not made compulsory by law. Both governments spend an equal fraction of the total budget on education (about 25%). In state A, 84% of rural children do not pay any fee for primary education but that number is only 48% in state B. 60% of rural primary school children get free textbooks and supplies in state A, only 2% in state B. Households with less than Rs 3000 in annual per capita income spend 25% of the income on elementary education in State A but in state B it is 36%. The poor in state B spend the highest fraction of their income on their children's basic education compared to the poor in any other state in the country.

Given these facts – more children get free education and supplies in state A and the poor are asked to spend more of their own money in state B – what would be the expected performance of the education system in the two states? State B, however, has 91% literacy rate while state A only 57%. Moreover, in state A 46% of children (age 6-14) have never enrolled in school,

TABLE 1

State Commitment to Education		
Characteristics	State A	State B
Elementary education compulsory	Yes	No
Fee-free primary education	84%	48%
Free textbooks and stationary	60%	2%
Proportion of income spent on primary education by households in the lowest income quintile	25%	36%
Proportion of state universities' budget given by the government	91%	54%
Share of education in the state budget	26%	25%

TABLE 2

State Performance in Education		
Characteristics	State A	State B
Literacy rate	57%	91%
Children (age 6-14) Never enrolled	46%	2%

only two per cent in state B suffer from that fate. Well, state A is West Bengal and state B is Kerala. What explains this vast difference in performance?

I would like to argue that the difference in performance can be explained not by how much the state's spend but by how they allocate their resources on education. Table 3 describes the distribution of education expenditures.

In a Marxist state like Kerala, 60% of the rural primary schools are private, as compared to only 11% in West Bengal. The proportion of private primary schools in Kerala is the highest in the country; the second highest is Meghalaya at 21%, while the national average is only 5%. The government of Kerala also pays expenses of almost half the students enrolled in private primary schools. The number for West Bengal is 15%, which is the third highest in the country (Tamil Nadu is at 20%); the national average is again about 5%.

TABLE 3

Distribution of State Education Spending		
Characteristics	State A	State B
Free primary education in government schools	84%	48%
Free primary education in private schools	15%	48%
Grant of scholarship Transport subsidy	2.3%	5.4%
Proportion of private (aided) primary schools	11%	60%

Kerala has the highest proportion of private primary schools and it also subsidizes the highest proportion of students in private schools. This gives the citizens of Kerala wider effective choice in selecting primary schools for their children. The choices available to parents must increase attendance as well as retention rate in the state.

Kerala also encourages competition among schools. By subsidizing transportation costs, Kerala helps parents send children to the school they consider best, irrespective of the distance. This in turn increases competition among schools. Provision of direct scholarships to students in Kerala too leads to the same result. With the scholarship money, students can attend a school of their choice. Among all the states in the country, the highest proportion of children in Kerala receives transportation subsidy and direct scholarships (Table 3).

The Kerala model of education – of choice and competition – is unique in the country and so is Kerala's educational performance. The Marxist state seems to employ the principles of the market system!

In Kerala, not only has the government spent more on education but so have the people. The poor in the state spend about 36% of their annual per capita income on elementary education – the highest proportion in the country (Table 1). Contrary to conventional wisdom, government spending is not a substitute for private spending. Both seem to grow together; they are complementary. It does no good to design schemes for free education. Parents' financial commitment to their children's education is a crucial component of quality education.

With the use of the Kerala model of education, I will outline three criteria that any good education policy or reform proposal must meet.

1. Increase choice and competition: It is more readily accepted that increased choice and competition is good for higher education. But primary education, it is maintained, cannot survive without government involvement. It is argued that people are poor and often lack understanding of the significance of literacy, such that if government did not take the full financial responsibility and did not make elementary education compulsory, our literacy rates would never improve. Many maintain that for achieving basic education in a poor country like ours, government must run and fund schools.

In reality, the poor, especially the rural poor, spend a substantial portion of their income on their children's basic education. For the year 1986-87, the total household expenditure on primary education was Rs 7388.5 million. And primary education is supposed to be free in the country! This private spending on primary education is not just by the rich in urban areas. Out of the Rs 7388.5 million, Rs 4202.5 million were spent by rural areas, more than half of the total private expenditure. In that year, the total government expenditure on primary education was Rs 17,000 million. So private expenditure is by no means an insignificant amount; it was more than 40% of what the government spent on primary education. The poor are already spending on education; they will be better off by having a variety of schools to choose from where they can exercise their spending power to get the kind of education they want. The license-permit raj must end in education as it has in the economy. This would have the same effect on education as it had on the economy.

2. Make schools student – and not teacher – centered:

The education system is designed more for the convenience of teachers than students. Since teachers have to be at school from 8 to 2 or 10 to 5, so students too must get educated at the designated place and time. What if one has to help on the farm during 8 to 2 or attend to younger siblings? That is seen as a clear indication that the person is not really serious about education. Why should all schools run on the same schedule? Why can't the convenience of students be a factor in determining school timings?

All government businesses work for the benefit of those who are employed and not for the welfare and convenience of customers. Businesses that face competition are more responsive to customers' needs. Only increased competition would make schools student-centered.

3. Link school revenues with school performance: Currently, government grants to schools are automatic. A school's budget does not depend on its performance. Linking government grants with performance would help realign self-interest and incentives of the school with the needs of its customers. A direct way to gauge performance is to consider the number of students who pass the standardized board examinations. A school's revenues could be linked with that number. Schools must earn their revenues by fulfilling their responsibilities.

**Surjit Bhalla:** The first issue is: Does education affect economic growth? In the 1980s, the works of Roemer, Lucas, and Barro gave the answer in affirmative. They claimed that there are significant externalities to education in relation to growth. Education is the reason why some countries grow faster than others. This thesis made a lot of sense. But new research, some of which is done by me, suggests otherwise: There are no growth externalities to education. Many countries with high levels of education (Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Costa Rica) did not grow very fast at all. It turns out that the openness of the economy has a great deal more to do with economic growth than the level of education. Despite high levels of education, the above mentioned countries did not grow at above-average level because they had numerous controls on economic activity.

The second issue is whether increased government expenditure increases levels of education. This is a supply and demand issue. It is generally assumed that if government supplies more education, the demand will increase to match it. But state level data does not support the proposition. Many states that spent above average on education during 1970-90 did

not achieve any higher level of education. A more likely and sustainable scenario is that high economic growth increases private demand for education, which in turn induces higher supply of education. So high growth leads to higher education and not vice versa.

The third issue is whether the government should be involved in education. The moral justification for government involvement is the promise of equality of opportunity to all. But that does not mean that the government should be involved in the financing and provision of education. The government subsidizes fertilizer but it does not have to produce it. The traditional argument, made recently by Amartya Sen, is that in all developed western countries, governments provide education; we shouldn't try to invent a new wheel or be experimental. It is the first time I've heard Sen use western countries as a model for India. Importantly, the argument evades the distinction between financing and provision of education. The government should finance but should not necessarily produce educational facilities.

I have proposed a scheme that simultaneously tackles the problem of poverty, literacy and discrimination against the girl child in education. The government should give each girl child below the poverty line a sum of, say, Rs 3,500 a year as long as she is enrolled in school. Parents will be able to afford to send their girls to school and they will be completely free to choose their own school. Anyone will be able to provide education as long as they meet the demands of the customers. This is the best income transfer programme.

**Jandhyala B.G. Tilak:** Let me first comment on Professor Shah's presentation. Even though the data used is from my work, the observations and conclusions are entirely his own. He offers a different interpretation of the same numbers and facts. A comparison of any two states at a point in time is problematic and needs to be attempted with much caution. Historical investments of monetary and non-monetary resources in education in Kerala have been very high. Recently, Himachal Pradesh rapidly increased its level of education by, well, spending a lot of money. Government involvement and expenditures matter a great deal in education, especially in primary education.

Kerala has the highest proportion of private aided primary schools. But there is absolutely no difference between these and government schools. There is really no choice for parents. All the schools abide by the same regulations and laws and have the same curriculum and quality of teachers. If the Kerala model is described as

a market model because it has large number of private aided schools, then we must say that the whole of higher education in India is a market model. More than 57% of students are in private colleges. And the performance of higher education is not much better than that of our primary education.

In fact, the private aided sector has generally contributed to distortions in the allocation of public resources. A small private sector devours a substantially larger part of government funds. This can be explained by political economy arguments. If government schools are bad then it is at least partly due to the existence of the private sector.

As for expenditures by households on education, I propose the following hypothesis. When government services are good, the households are also willing to spend more; public and private spending are complementary. But when government services are not efficient, expenditures by households and the government are substitutes. Households are compelled to spend more because the government does not spend enough. Households are certainly not happy about the extra expense; they are forced by circumstance.

I do not agree that government can withdraw from primary education. This applies to higher education too. If you think that the private market will fulfil the need, then it is not based on our experience in India. The motives and incentives of private markets in India are different from those in developed countries. That explains why our private firms do not invest in R&D. I'm not at all hopeful about private sector providing primary or higher education in any meaningful way.

There is a lot of talk about subsidies to higher education. What really is the amount of subsidy? Kaushik Basu writes that in many Indian universities and colleges students pay about Rs 25 a year in fees. This is not true. On average, almost 15% of the cost of higher education comes from students. This ratio is comparable to any other developed country. Empirically one cannot claim that subsidies to higher education in India are too high. Despite poor quality, colleges have succeeded in democratizing education. Almost 40% of students now come from economically challenged backgrounds, unlike in the 1950s when education was highly elitist.

We cannot have a uniform policy for higher education; we need to differentiate between undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate studies. Also, difference between general, professional, and technical education must be kept in mind. Even in profes-

sional and technical areas, things cannot be left to the market, as Surjit Bhalla seems to suggest. Left to market forces, not only humanities and social sciences, including economics and political science, but also natural and physical sciences will disappear. If you want only engineering and management training, then the market can be relied upon. But that is not higher education.

**N.V. Varghese:** Many of the indicators of educational development, such as literacy rate, enrolment ratios, and retention rate put Kerala on the top of the education map of India. However, my own recent empirical study shows that the levels of learning among primary school children in Kerala are almost at par with that of students from educationally backward states of India like Assam and Orissa. The Kerala model has succeeded in universalizing access to education. However, it has not yet succeeded in universalizing higher levels for learning among primary school children. Therefore, it is important to keep this aspect in mind while advocating a Kerala model of education for other states.

Shah's presentation argued that the education model in Kerala is based on market principles and not Marxist principles. I disagree with such analysis. What Kerala shows is the benefits of a progressive state adopting a progressive education policy. The state public policy has played an important role in promoting education in Kerala. The major advantage that Kerala had compared to almost all other states is that the colonial powers did not destroy the state's school system. The schools were actually transformed by the grants given by the government under the policy of the 1860s. The private sector has since been dominant in Kerala's education field. Kerala is comprised of many communities, and they have healthy competition among them. When a particular community started a school, it did not restrict admission to its own children. In Kerala, there is neither a Marxist nor a market model. It is, if at all, a community model.

The Indian education scenario is faced with the dilemma of how to educate people on the one hand and what to do with the educated on the other. While the former question relates to issues pertaining to improved access to education for the poor, the latter question relates to issues pertaining to the unemployment of the educated who are mostly from middle class and upper middle class families.

The public initiatives over the years have increased the base of primary education and hence

competition for admissions at higher levels of education has increased. This increased competition pushes out many of the aspirants from obtaining higher education qualifications. The competition is largely for getting degrees in selected disciplines from prestigious institutions. This is partly due to the fact that there is less unemployment among graduates of institutions like IITs and IIMs. The middle and upper-middle class feel the distress of increased competition. It is this distress that is articulated by people from the same class at seminars and conferences.

Admission to professional and technical courses is based on selection tests, not on the marks achieved in degree exams. Students who have graduated from English medium schools have an advantage over others in getting admission in selection-test based courses. Those who can afford it, invest in English medium schools, generally private schools. The poor do not have a choice in this case. The poor in urban areas cannot afford private primary education and the private primary schools are rare in rural areas. The poor depend mostly on government schools. The choice is only for urban people, affluent people, and English speaking people.

In education, what are we subsidizing? Only direct expenditure on education is subsidized, not indirect expenses. And indirect expenses are much larger. Unless we address indirect expenses, we cannot expand education opportunity in any meaningful way. Involvement of the state is certainly necessary. Whether the state should subsidize and disappear, or whether it should also be involved in production is another issue. In higher education, the state only subsidizes, most of the management is private. But higher education has lot of problems, just like in primary education. My theory then is that private sector is good when it is small; when it expands, it faces the same problems as the public sector. Only 2.5% of the children are in private schools; 97.5% are in government schools. If we were to switch these numbers, I do not know what it would do to the quality of education in private schools.

Consider the people who are in decision-making positions in India. Earlier, they came from government schools, now most of them are from private schools. It is not that the quality of education is good in private schools, it is largely because they use English as a medium of instruction. We define criteria for quality education on the basis of middle class notions, and then declare that public schools do not perform. Public schools can never win.



## A report

WHILE the country was in the final stages of campaigning for the 12th Lok Sabha elections, the Second Asia Regional Literacy Forum met in New Delhi between 9-13 February 1998, to discuss issues on the broad theme of Innovation and Professionalization of Adult Literacy - A Focus on Diversity. India has the dubious distinction of being the country with the largest number of adult illiterates and the collective literacy rate of the South Asian Region is lowest in the world. While it is true that India has a large adult literacy programme spearheaded by the National Literacy Mission (NLM), illiteracy continues to be a daunting problem. Being the venue for the Asia Regional Literacy Forum provided a welcome opportunity to a large number of

Indian participants, as well as those from other South Asian countries, to share their experiences and interact with experts and practitioners from Asia and elsewhere.

This meeting, jointly organized by the International Literacy Institute (ILI) Philadelphia, set up by UNESCO, and the NLM, Government of India, followed close on the heels of the First Asia Regional Literacy Forum in Manila in May 1997 and the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg in July 1997. It would appear that there is growing concern at the unacceptably high rates of illiteracy in many parts of the world. The prevailing low rates of 'functional' literacy in several industrialized countries is another. With the decade of

the '90s nearing its end and the goal of Education for All by 2000 AD still a distant cry, the need to press for greater financial support to adult literacy programmes (including non-formal education) to reach those unreached by primary schooling has become urgent. International gatherings, no doubt, succeed in getting some media attention and bring issues to the forefront, enabling planners, policy-makers and programme managers to convert the renewed interest into greater allocation of resources and improvements in the formulation and execution of programmes.

The gathering at the Second Asia Regional Literacy Forum was a diverse one, with varied interests within the broad domain of literacy work. Dedicated field practitioners with a rich experience of working with rural communities; academics and researchers pleading for deeper and inter-disciplinary understanding of adult learning and the multiple practices of literacy; international donor agencies and NGO partners highlighting their work and negotiating for greater 'space' with government officials; and, of course, the organizers steering the agenda towards the predetermined outcome. Everybody rushed about to catch as many of the parallel sessions as possible, making new acquaintances during the informal breaks, picking up an idea or two here and there, wondering what the whole thing was about!

At the end of it all, a few discernible ideas and trends emerged as key issues. Adult illiteracy is and will remain a problem for some time to come, not only in countries like India but even in countries which have achieved a significantly higher rate of literacy. Traditional assumptions about illiteracy have changed with evidence of multiple definitions and practices of literacy. The large-scale state sponsored literacy programmes, as part of the modernization process or development agenda, have failed to 'eradicate illiteracy'. While individuals and communities are interested in acquiring literacy skills, the dominant and standardised modes of literacy instruction continue to be alienating. NGO experiences that are participatory and culturally specific have proven more successful. While there is no dearth of innovation and experimentation, professional development and quality research is less in evidence. There continues to be a gap between the promise of decentralised and participatory planning and curriculum development, gender sensitivity, mother tongue literacy, and the realities on the

ground. Within the domain of basic education, adult literacy remains neglected.

While there was a consensus on the need for diversity – the catchphrase at the Forum was that the 'one size fits all' model does not work – there was no unanimity even in the approach to the solutions. There appeared to be two contrary pulls (and that is true about most 'development' agenda). There were the proponents of micro-level, decentralised, participatory programming with the local groups/communities (functioning democratically!) deciding along with friendly 'facilitators' or literacy activists what kind of literacy, for whom, when and how, taking things at people's own pace. On the other side were the macro-planners and ideologues of modernization who plan on a big scale, talk of replicability and measurable impacts. Everyone seemed overwhelmed by the mind-boggling numbers, worried that time was running out and that the quality of life for the poor and disadvantaged was not improving fast enough, thereby marginalising even more people (women, tribals and street children to mention a few disempowered and marginalised groups). Handling the conflict and challenges this dichotomy brings to the domain of adult education remains the primary area of work for the researcher, activist and programme managers alike, provided we do not get carried away with our own sense of self-importance.

In the final analysis it was the words of Mahashweta Devi, who delivered the keynote address, that linger in the mind. Having spent a lifetime working among the tribal people in the Purulia district of West Bengal, she felt that she was still learning from them. It is their stories and folklore which she has used as texts to teach them reading and writing and it is their desire to learn and understand the changes taking place which has given her the confidence and courage to initiate various development programmes in the area. Mahashweta Devi appealed to the Forum: 'Don't go to teach them. Learn from the people first.' This message was echoed by Paulo Freire in a brief film excerpt screened at the Forum. Recorded a few weeks before his death, Freire urged everybody to respect the plurality of viewpoints. 'It is our political duty, ethical duty to be tolerant.' This attitude of humility must be the foundation for those engaged in adult education.

**Avik Ghosh**

# Books

**PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA.** A World Bank Publication. Allied Publishers, Delhi, 1997.

'....once it was understood an educated populace is the first requirement for economic progress. That essential fact was forgotten: impressive steel mills, great hydro-electric dams, were too often cited amid ignorant people. I have previously made the point that in this world there is no literate population that is poor, no illiterate population that is other than poor' (Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, 1992, New Delhi).

The World Bank report reviews India's recent efforts to remedy past problems in educational attainment at the primary school level, the current state of education in India, and the challenges that remain. In the present scenario of fiscal adjustment and increasing administrative and political decentralisation, it stresses that the overall challenge for India is to sustain and deepen the ongoing reforms in primary education. Although India has made progress towards universalizing primary education and is envisaged to achieve nearly universal enrolment rates at the primary level by 2005, it will still be two decades behind Indonesia and Malaysia and three decades behind the Republic of Korea.

The book addresses pertinent questions such as why investments in primary education are important, what is required and what it will take to expand and

improve primary education, and how India can afford what is needed. Justification for investments in primary education are made on the ground that primary schooling offers the greatest economic and social returns and society also gains through the externalities it generates in the form of benefits which extend beyond the individuals who receive schooling.

A compelling case is made for having governments share the cost of schooling. Millions of children in India never get enrolled in school and millions more are withdrawn before they complete the primary cycle. Thus, even with 'free' schooling, the demand factor seems to be weak, as parents seem to view the cost of schooling higher than the benefit it generates. Therefore a strong case is made for public provisioning of primary education, specially to enable poor children avail of its benefits. Only when the proportion of children who complete a basic educational level increases significantly, will the population benefit fully from the economic changes occurring in the country. Given the considerable variation in educational achievements across states, districts and schools, packages of interventions identified locally to meet the specific needs of schools, the pivotal role of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is emphasized as a means to support the local development of the primary schools.

The challenges of educational development in India need to be studied against the large diversities in

educational and socio-economic development among the states. Six states (A.P., Bihar, M.P., Rajasthan, U.P. and West Bengal) account for three quarters of children who are out of school. It can be expected that these children belong to districts that have low female literacy. Many of these out of school children live in remote areas, belong to hard-to-reach groups or have special educational needs. The need of the hour is to bridge what have quite aptly been flagged as the three important gaps in education in India: the gender gap, the poverty gap, and the caste and tribal gap.

Poverty is found to be the main cause of gender, caste and tribal gaps in enrolment and retention. It may also contribute to gaps in learning achievement. The strategies adopted for improving educational outcomes and for bridging these gaps vary across states and among groups. Although various state programmes have tried to target the group of disadvantaged children for providing incentives for school participation, it is pointed out that these have been insufficient and poorly targeted. At the school level, they may have led to the over-reporting of enrolment of girls and children belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It has been correctly stated that some of the constraints contributing to gaps in education are more cultural than economic and appropriate strategies are needed to address them. The chapter on the gaps in enrolment, retention and achievement, discusses in detail the various factors responsible for the existence and persistence of such gaps and the possible strategies for reducing them.

Improving teachers' performance is identified as the most important challenge for primary education in India. It is pointed out that although teachers' salaries constitute the largest share of the education budget, teachers' performance falls short of what is needed for all children to complete primary school with adequate learning. Primary school teachers, it is pointed out, comprise the largest, most steadily growing profession in India, with nearly 2.8 million primary and upper primary teachers in place in 1993. Even then, within the profession, a gender bias exists, with men outnumbering women by more than two to one in primary teaching. This is worth noting for policy purposes, given that participation in schooling, specially for the female child, depends to a large extent on the presence of female teachers.

Despite the fact that teachers' salaries are comparable to those of other government workers with similar qualifications, teacher motivation towards teaching seems to be quite low. The problems seem to

lie in poor working conditions, low perceived status, and limited opportunities for career advancement and promotion (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). The main challenge, therefore, is to improve the incentives for good performance by the teaching staff at the primary level in India.

In trying to address the need for improving the access to schooling and efficiency in the functioning of schools, the focus in the book is more on enrolment rates as compared to attendance rates at the primary level. It is a well known fact that enrolment figures for the primary school cycle are quite unreliable in the Indian context. School attendance rates are more reliable when one is trying to analyze the demand and supply side factors that constrain participation. Given that district level data is available from the census publications, an in-depth analysis of the factors that underlie the dismal school attendance rates would have been more appropriate.

Another issue that has not been addressed is the large proportion of working children in the primary school-going age group. Any study of factors governing participation in schooling in general and primary education in particular stands incomplete without a discussion of the issue of workforce participation by children. Child labour is an important factor that constraints children from going to school. Finally, there is the issue of 'nowhere children' (Chaudhuri, 1996) which also needs to be brought out, specially in the Indian context and is not dealt with explicitly in the book. There is a large child population in the 5-14 age group, which is neither at work nor at school. This pool of children forms a large proportion of the child population and needs to be tapped by any policy that endeavours to bring every child into the primary education net. Any education policy that aims at universalizing or even making primary education compulsory, needs to have on its agenda measures that address these 'nowhere children.'

The final issue the book addresses is one of how India is going to finance more and better primary education for its children. The financial capacity, according to the report, does exist in India. What is needed to provide better, universal primary education, is a substantial increase in state spending on primary schooling, an increase in central government transfers, and a strengthening of institutional capacity. Approximate estimations suggest that to achieve universal primary education by the year 2007, India will have to raise its current spending on education from 3.7% of GDP to 6% by the end of the Ninth Plan.

With the implementation of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution and the devolution of power, the responsibility of education can be seen to shift towards the district level personnel, school headmasters and village education committees. Institutions of *panchayati raj* can now be envisaged to play a greater and more positive role in monitoring the functioning of local schools, teacher absenteeism, school maintenance, enrolment and attendance and mobilization of resources for the schools under their purview. This would also involve the local community more in the functioning of the schools in the locality. All this can be expected to work towards the better functioning of the schooling system and also promote greater educational achievements. Given such developments in India, one can end here by sharing the book's optimistic tone that providing all children with primary education of high quality is certainly within India's grasp. All it now needs is a determined and sustained effort.

**Usha Jayachandran**

**EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND UNDER-DEVELOPMENT** edited by Sureshchandra Shukla and Rekha Kaul. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

IT is always difficult to review a collection of essays on a broad theme as education, development and underdevelopment. The canvas is so vast that it can include almost anything. I started reading the collection wondering whether there was anything that bound the essays together. The collection moves from the oft repeated arguments on India's colonial legacy to essays on popular language, agricultural modernisation, structural adjustment, privatisation, higher education, a case study of a school in a working class settlement, the Dalit movement in Maharashtra, the Nellore anti-liquor movement and ends with stories of alternative models. The essay on China stands out as a sore thumb in a volume that is primarily focused on India. The editors have tried to look for a common thread to bind essays that seem to have been written as stand alone pieces. According to the editors, this volume was put together to understand persisting inequalities in education despite the deliberate measures for economic progress and take a closer look at the historical background and nature of development and extent to which education has addressed itself to the needs of the people.

The essays in the volume reflect uneven quality. Sumanta Banerjee's article on popular education in

colonial times is interesting and mirrors the debate on today's total literacy programme. Together with the late M. Shatrugna's piece on the literacy campaign and anti-liquor movement in Nellore, it explores the ideology and politics of adult education primers and popular newspapers/broad-sheets for neo-literates. The editors could have tried to develop this theme as it is of great relevance to India. The literacy campaign and its spin-offs in a few areas in the country tells us a lot about missed opportunities and deliberate derailing of movements with grandiose promises. Literacy material often reinforces prevailing attitudes and stereotypes. Nellore was more an exception than a norm. As Banerjee points out, an analysis of a pedagogic experiment like Sulabh Samachar in 19th century Bengal, becomes relevant for an understanding of similar pedagogic intervention today in adult education by the Indian state.

The attitudinal biases of the educated middle class pedagogues who designed the lessons for neo-literates in the NLM programmes ... can be traced back to the colonial era. The legacy continues – sometimes surreptitiously (even without the modern pedagogues being aware of the colonial education that shaped their biases), and sometimes consciously (carried out by those pedagogues who seriously adhere to the old colonial belief in looking down upon the unlettered masses as a commodity to be manipulated to serve the interests of the state). ... The Nellore anti-liquor movement demonstrated the potential of literacy materials that reflect real life situation of participants. Unfortunately, as is evident in Sadhna Saxena's essay on Education of the Poor – durability of promising innovations and replicability of effective strategies remain a major challenge.

Jandhyalaya Tilak's article on the effects of structural adjustment on education is not only informative, but it captures the complex dynamics at play in different countries. Extrapolating the experience of Africa and South America to Asia is hazardous. Experience in this region has shown that it is difficult to isolate the effects of adjustment on education. The effect has not been uniform in the region and some countries and some sectors have suffered severely. Tilak categorises the countries as 'intensely adjusting', 'adjusting' and 'non-adjusting'. It is interesting that, with the exception of Pakistan and Bangladesh, resources to primary education seem to have been protected in most countries in the region. The relative share of primary education has increased in India and Malaysia. Another noteworthy finding is that while gender discrimination

has increased as far as the stock of the educated people is concerned, gender discrimination in enrolments has come down in all the countries. The relative share of private sector seems to be increasing.

This observation is borne out in Rekha Kaul's chapter titled *Disorders in Education: Private Enterprise and the State*. She points out that commercialisation is taking place at all levels – starting from the pre-nursery stage to professional and technical education. Lowering of standards, inequality, and an obvious elite bias is evident across the country. Is increased 'state intervention' the answer in a country where government run institutions are in shambles? Privatisation may have increased the opportunities for the rich, but the fact remains that even where good quality public institutions exist, they are out of the reach of the poor. Intensive coaching, specialised inputs and a highly competitive academic environment has pushed the poor out of the education race. While education cannot be left to the mercy of free market forces, it should also be taken out of the clutches of a corrupt bureaucracy and corrupt polity.

Mohammad Talib and Padma Velaskar's chapters present useful case studies and reinforce the broad thrust of the collection. Krishna Kumar's piece, though misplaced in this volume, is insightful. On the whole this collection of essays makes for interesting reading but stops short of providing a book of significance.

**Vimala Ramachandran**

**LEARNING AND FREEDOM: Policy, Pedagogy and Paradigms in Indian Education and Schooling** by John Robert Shotton. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

'THE country has reached a stage in its economic and technical development when a major effort must be made to derive the maximum benefit from the assets already created and to ensure that the fruits of change reach all sections – education is the highway to that goal.... Education develops manpower for different levels of the economy – it is also the substrate on which research and development flourish, being the ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance.... The deleterious consequences of non-investment or inadequate investment in education are indeed very serious' (National Policy on Education, 1986, modified in 1992).

The rhetoric of Indian education routinely includes statements like the above – 50 years of such

posturing has failed to deliver an educational system that serves the needs of the nation. John Robert Shotton's book addresses the vitally important issue of the crisis of Indian education through a consideration of its philosophy (posturing) and practice (reality). He looks at the present condition of education without delving too deeply into the historical reasons for its poor state of health. Shotton's endeavour is to look forward and explore a 'new departure' that has a fundamentally different philosophical and practical base. Exemplifying a wide range of interesting initiatives from India and abroad, Shotton tries to develop working models for a new-look educational policy for the next century.

There are virtually no equivalents of clinical trials (commonly used in medical research) in the field of education in India. Teaching methods and courses depend on teachers' subjective judgements and preferences, not evidence about effectiveness. There are almost no educational research centres in India that can provide an objective guidance on educational policy and practice. Therefore, Shotton's well-researched and carefully documented book comes as a breath of fresh air to the closed rooms of educational debate in India. An academic background in London and Cambridge, along with many years spent with the Sri Aurobindo Education Society in Delhi, seems to have given Shotton the perspective as well as the objectivity to deal with this contentious issue.

However, schools cannot depend on the arrival of supermen to become more effective. Shotton's 'new departure' is not without its problems – the problems of implementation that he does recognise. To wish them away by stating that schools need better teachers is at best an evasion. There are far too many schools and similar institutions in the country to man with the best people, especially in a profession that produces no economic surplus. There is no evidence that education is any more devoid of its great men than business is. But if schools cannot be made effective by being run by average teachers, normal people, then all is lost. It is the system that requires a change so that ordinary people who endeavour to work hard in the right directions can adequately fulfil the tasks of schooling. It is these right directions that Shotton addresses so effectively.

But the educational community itself most often hampers the search for effectiveness. It is extremely dangerous to raise the question as to what the purpose of the school is. The objectives may be measured against yardsticks of performance and staff may fail

this test. There will always be various definitions of a school and what it should do. The various constituents of a school argue and alienate support for themselves. Often the institution itself shuns the search for its mission. Each of the many definitions of a school is plausible and can be defended. The answer lies in striking a balance between the various objectives. Most schools in India pretend that there are no fundamental questions to be answered. If this thinking persists, schools cannot carry out any mission at all, let alone be effective. Shotton believes effective education develops 'potential, curiosity, interaction, application, the development of personal powers, and the generation of personal confidence.' He rightly emphasises the contribution of the local community in educational transactions and reiterates that schools need to be more democratic in their functioning. The shift from teaching to learning and from content to process have been debated for long enough. Shotton's unique contribution lies in his attempt to offer a realistic way forward.

For the last 40 years, India has followed a pattern of school education that has promised much but delivered little. Our school system is in a state of crisis and it must be realised that it has not performed. In a world of rising educational standards, where our school children should match the best for more than knowledge and hard work, the lack of performance of schools must lead to a drastic and radical reform of education. We can neither afford illiterate and semi literate young people, nor can we waste the talents of our finest students by grinding their enthusiasm to dust in the mill of our rigid and ill-structured system. Shotton has offered a way forward, a 'new departure'. His book is a must for all those who care about the state of Indian education, especially those who desire to do something about it. *Learning and Freedom* is aptly titled and tells one how to go about transforming Indian education in a scholarly but eminently readable fashion.

**Shashank Vira**

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN INTENTION AND ACTION: Girls and Women's Education in South Asia** edited by Vimala Ramachandran. Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, New Delhi; UNESCO-PROAP, Bangkok, 1998.

THIS book contains country studies on Bangladesh (Roushan Jehan), India (Vimala Ramachandran), Nepal (L.N. Belbase, K.N. Shrestha, Saloni Singh) and Pakistan (Ruquia Jafri) with an overview drawing

together the main recommendations arising from these. Sponsored by UNESCO, it is an attempt to evaluate progress made in achieving universal primary education in South Asia, and in particular to understand the nature of the gender gap and the reasons behind its persistence. The objective of the exercise is to identify interventions: as the preface puts it, 'in the hope that gender gaps in basic education in South Asia will soon be a phenomenon of the past.'

The book will be a valuable reference for students and policy-makers concerned with education. Each of the four studies includes a historical review of education policy and of attitudes and initiatives regarding girls education; of available gender disaggregated data; and an examination of both governmental and non-governmental schemes that demonstrate successful approaches to female education.

However, the motivation of this book is clearly something beyond description or documentation. In all four countries, the initial approach towards girls education was to treat it as something to be accomplished as part of the objective of universal education. So in Nepal, for example, co-education at all levels was favoured (Belbase, Shrestha, Singh: 171). In the seventies and eighties, however, it was recognised that the issues surrounding girls education were different from that of boys education, leading to special programmes and incentives, and in some cases to special schools.

The functional benefits associated with educating girls – lower levels of fertility, better child health and nutrition, higher productivity – had a strong influence on policy formulation. Along with this was the more feminist view that education is a means of empowering women. These arguments drew heavily on international policy statements. In particular, the focus on women during the International Women's Decade of the seventies, the renewed commitment to basic education in the eighties, and the UNESCO/UNICEF/UNDP conference on Education For All in Jomtien in 1990, made an impact both on thinking and on aid allocations.

Although mainstream educational programmes were largely developed with national resources, in all four countries the programmes that had an explicit focus on 'gender equity' have been developed with support from external donors. This book argues that policies need to continue this special focus, on a larger scale, and with a higher level of decentralization.

In attempting to explain the gender gap in education, all four studies reconfirm that this has as much

to do with perceptions and attitudes as with financial resources and physical infrastructure. All over South Asia, social norms still largely favour 'separate but equal' worlds for men and women – an approach to equality that may be old fashioned but still has much support the world over (Bergmann, 1997). Equality, in the sense of seeking similar lives, with similar opportunities for growth and fulfilment for boys and girls, is not a widely held objective. Against this understanding, the lower value placed on girls education is not irrational.

Programmes attempting to increase girls enrolment and participation in school activities have to confront the deep-rooted beliefs of people regarding 'appropriate' roles and behaviour for girls. For example, it is reported that some parents were willing to let their daughters learn how to read, but were reluctant to have them learn how to write (Jafri: 240). The experience of South East Asian countries, which have been successful in achieving equality in education (and employment) between men and women, is testimony to the effectiveness of the functional uses of schooling (i.e. the education-employment link), though not necessarily to its 'empowering' role (Kuah Khun Eng, 1997). In South Asia too, it is considerably easier to convince parents that educating a girl will help her to earn more (and hence be a stronger partner in a marriage and within a household) than to persuade them that liberating the mind is desirable; and that education is a means of doing this.

Seen from this perspective, the suggestions made in this book for reducing the gender gap in education are both practical and feasible. Increasing the number of women teachers is strongly recommended. Women teachers provide role models for girls and their presence has been seen to overcome parental resistance to sending girls to school. However, increasing their numbers given the low levels of female literacy overall, requires a special commitment. It can be done, as the experience of pilot projects in India shows. A second recommendation is to examine and continue incentives for girls schooling. A third is for modifying the delivery systems so as to increase the access of the very poor, disadvantaged and physically remote, 'reaching the unreached'. Imposing a uniform system on countries without taking account of the need to make appropriate regional modifications will not meet the challenges of persisting gender bias.

A strong plea is also made for learning from the experiences both of special and pilot schemes run by the government, and those of NGOs that have been able

to successfully achieve gender-sensitivity in educational planning and implementation, although it is recognized that both government and NGOs are susceptible to similar pressures from donors and from social/political considerations. Greater community involvement, with decentralised systems, is seen as offering a way out and a basis for optimism.

Donor priorities have influenced the development of educational policy and in particular have had a tangible impact on programmes that have targeted girls education. Without such targeting, the natural consequence of limited resources, poverty and belief in 'separate but equal' gender roles, will lead to widening disparities. A recent assessment of the difference made by Jomtien suggests that while the conference and subsequent deliberations succeeded in giving basic education a higher priority among aid donors, the actual aid disbursements remain inadequate to meet the EFA objectives (Bennell and Furlong, 1998). This book, with its careful identification of approaches to education that have been seen to be workable, ought to help in keeping basic education on the agenda of concerned donors.

No attempt is made here to evaluate the financial implications of achieving universal education, perhaps because without a sensitive use of funds no real progress can be expected. In fact, the real reason behind the gap between policy statements and ground realities is that 'real decisions are taken at the time of preparation of action plans, projects, or during budget allocations' (Ramachandran: 88). Rigid financial and procedural systems can undo any attempt at innovation. Having understood the reasons for gender gaps, and the need to allow, at least in the short run, for multiple delivery systems, 'formal, non-formal, condensed, satellite and residential', countries will have to find the political will to keep basic education for all, particularly girls education, high on their priorities, and allow flexibility and innovation within educational systems.

**Ratna M. Sudarshan**

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# In memoriam

## John Bissell 1931-98

ON a rainy evening in early March, several hundred people who have helped write the story of modern India—politicians from different parties, leading figures from business and industry, artists, diplomats, even M.S. Gill, still busy tallying more than 340 million ballots cast in the 12th Lok Sabha election—gathered in a Friends Colony garden to remember a man whose life, like a rich cross-thread in one of the hand-woven fabrics that were his life's work, bound together much that is best in the spirit of India and the United States.

John Bissell was an American who began his education at Yale University at about the time in the late 1940s that Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues embarked on the task of building 'the noble mansion

of free India.' Already, John's love affair with India had begun, rooted in tales his father told of his experiences in India during the Second World War. But he could not then have guessed how deeply his own life would become interwoven with India's, nor how much it would express of the two countries' natural affinities.

That March evening, beneath the *shamiana* John's family had erected in their garden, became as much a celebration of those affinities as a memorial for John, which was just as he would have wished it. The evening provided only a single reference to the ironic counterpoint to those affinities that was provided throughout much of John's life by the strained political relations between India and the

United States, and then it was only to emphasize how estranged from that estrangement John felt.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, fresh from his election disappointment in Tamil Nadu, recalled meeting John in New Delhi in December 1971, at the moment when Richard Nixon was attempting to halt Pakistan's reversal in Bangladesh's independence war by sending the U.S.S. Enterprise and its accompanying battle group into the Bay of Bengal. 'Before I could say a word, John threw his hands in the air and said, with a broad smile, "Honestly, Mani, I had nothing to do with it",' Mani Aiyar recalled.

Like many such jokes, John may even have half-meant it. Long after he had made his own mark in India, with his marriage to Bimla Nanda, the peripatetic Bim who became the torch that lit his life, with William and Monsoon, the Bissells' two children, and with the success of Fabindia Ltd., the company that marketed the village fabrics that were John's other great passion, he was vexed by the association that others made between him and his uncle Richard M. Bissell Jr., one of the legendary figures of the Central Intelligence Agency during the Cold War era.

How vexed was apparent in an anecdote that appeared in John's obituary in the New York Times. 'I once asked him if it was ever a problem having his name and being associated with one of the great spy masters of the modern era,' Steven Weisman, a former correspondent for the newspaper in New Delhi, said. 'John said that he was acutely aware of it, and that early in his life in India his uncle asked him casually if he would consider doing anything. He said he was enraged at even being asked, that it would ruin his life if it were known his uncle had asked him.'

John, of course, served his country better by becoming a model for America's enduring virtues. From Yale, he went to work at Macy's department store in New York, and there developed his love for the look and feel of hand-woven fabrics. In 1958, he won a Ford Foundation grant to travel to India and help villagers produce traditional goods for export. After the grant expired, he stayed on, founded Fabindia, and married Bim, who had worked as social secretary for Chester A. Bowles and John Kenneth Galbraith when they were United States ambassadors to India.

For more than 30 years, from the mid-1960s until the night before John suffered the stroke that brought his life to a close at the age of 66, the Bissell's home became one of New Delhi's finest clubs, a place

where people of all walks of life, and political persuasions, could meet in good fellowship to talk of India, and America, and everything in between. Nobody can measure how important that fellowship was to sustaining the ties between the two countries, but everyone who joined the club knew there was nowhere in New Delhi or New York, in India or America, quite like the Bissell's home for the humour, the zest, and the good talk of those occasions, and for the common ground they celebrated.

At the memorial gathering for John, those who knew him best spoke with great passion for John, and for Bim, whose own career at the World Bank became another platform for sustaining friendships between the two countries. Richard Celeste, the new American ambassador, remembered John from the 1960s, when the ambassador was a young diplomat in New Delhi with only a glimmer of the future that awaited him as a three-term Governor of Ohio.

John, Celeste recalled, was a 'lanky, laughing person', New Delhi's best 'jitterbugger', but also an exacting businessman, who spent hours attending to the smallest details of the crafts he was trying to promote. 'John represented the best of what America is about, and respected the best of what India is about,' he said. 'In this week when we have been hearing a lot about *swadeshi*, let us remember that John made it real for thousands of villagers; this was not politics, this was life.'

But for many who were there, nothing better captured the essence of John Bissell than the words of Arun Shourie, who met John in another field where John excelled, as a 'shy giver' to the causes of those in India who needed help the most. Speaking as a father with a disabled child, Arun Shourie spoke in a halting voice of how John's generosity, who dedicated a third of Fabindia's profits to charity, had sustained the Spastics Association of North India. But more than even his financial generosity, Arun said, John had given of himself, treating the children at the spastics centre not as a visiting patron but as though 'it was his honour to meet them.'

'Each one of us in John's circle of friends should find a cause, or someone in need, and give as John gave. And let the first drop of this habit be spent in memory of John.'

**John F. Burns**  
*The New York Times*  
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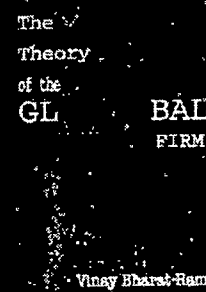
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# Backpage

WITH election fever safely behind us, observers can now settle down to monitor the performance of second-time crowned Prime Minister Vajpayee and the BJP led front in government. The times clearly are not auspicious. The antics of BJPs pre- and post-poll 'allies' – not just the 'imperious' Jayalalitha and the 'maverick' Subramanian Swamy, or the newly incarnated Biju Janata Dal, but even the 'time-tested' Samata Party – do not indicate pleasant auguries for the alliance's major plank, stability. The hope is that this time around the experiment will not be a 13 day wonder. No one quite wants another election, just yet.

Evolving the compromise national agenda or cobbling together a ministerial team, expectedly after hard and somewhat murky bargaining, should be enough to drive home the point that running a coalition government, a minority one at that, is unlikely to be smooth. Given the composition of the House wherein the ruling coalition enjoys but slender majority (assuming all its allies remain present at full strength, and some other groupings in the opposition oblige by abstaining), floor management will be a nightmare. No wonder, after the acrimonious electioneering, the favoured phrase today is consensus. The BJP has reason to be pleased with the statement by Sonia Gandhi, now in the Congress hot seat, that her party will play the role of a responsible, constructive opposition.

The BJP has made the first peace offering by dropping the 'controversial' projects of the Ram mandir, Article 370, uniform civil code, the Minorities Commission, and so on from the national agenda. The prime minister has talked of 'ushering in a new age of reconciliation and accord,' of 'ending the adversarial relationship between the ruling group and the opposition' because, 'the nation cannot afford such adversity.' Fine words indeed. But restraining its enthusiastic supporters, exultant at the dawn of a Hindu raj, may prove tough. Diluting core commitments may well be seen as a compromise to 'retain power at all costs' by the faithful.

The alliance partners, all 17 (or is it 20?) of them, evidently do not believe in the language of restraint. While George Fernandes along with Murli Manohar Joshi and Govindacharya (from the outside) is keen to tilt at multinational windmills, others (BJD, Trinamul Congress, AIADMK) are looking for central help to van-

quish local opponents. For them, it is state fortunes that matter. Already, in whichever provinces the ruling coalition has done well, the demand for dismissing governments, or at least vigorously pursuing allegations of corruption, have gathered strength. And this, when the alliance has yet to settle down.

What is equally distressing is that such language is matched by the opposition. Clearly, they too have learnt little from the electoral verdict. Be it Andhra, or Rajasthan, or Maharashtra – the Congress, which feels on the ascendant, has already pronounced on the illegitimacy of the ruling regimes. Making life difficult for your opponents, preferably pulling them down, is still the favoured political past-time.

Reams of analysis about the recently concluded election has still to drive home the point that our political parties, and the political system, is extremely fragile. No party, ruling or otherwise, has a basis for feeling secure about its perceived support base. Not only has the BSP style politics with its vitriolic casteist rhetoric come a cropper (notwithstanding a 20% vote share in U.P.), even the corporatist Left Front with a 20 year reign in West Bengal under its belt has been served notice. The Samajwadi Party with its aggressive secularism (read, drive out the BJP) or the Shiv Sena with its equally aggressive Hindutva too should realise the limitations of their confrontationist politics.

Our political culture, notwithstanding its diminution to a quarter of the popular vote, is still dominated by the Congress. It too, despite faring worse than expected, seems to have learnt little. The unseemly haste with which it anointed Sonia Gandhi to both its top positions (party presidency and leadership of the parliamentary party) indicates its continuing fascination with Dynasty. The fact that the leader was relatively unsuccessful in converting the crowds into votes, or that nearly all of her 'personal' candidates lost, has failed to drive home the importance of issues and organization.

The one silver lining in the March drama was provided by the sharp rebuff to Subramanian Swamy who, Emergency heroics apart, enjoys pride of place in our degenerate political culture. In refusing to kow-tow to his sabre rattling, Prime Minister Vajpayee deserves our gratitude.

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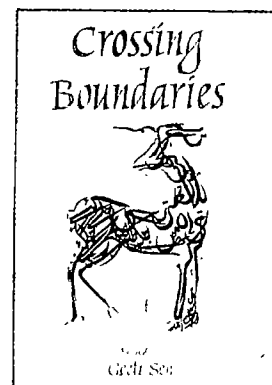
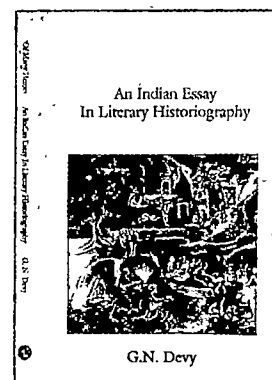
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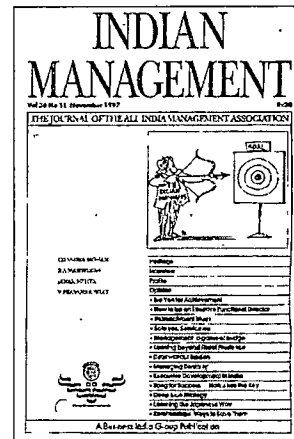
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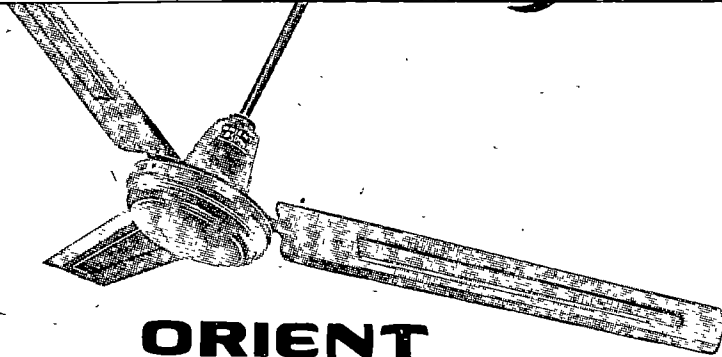
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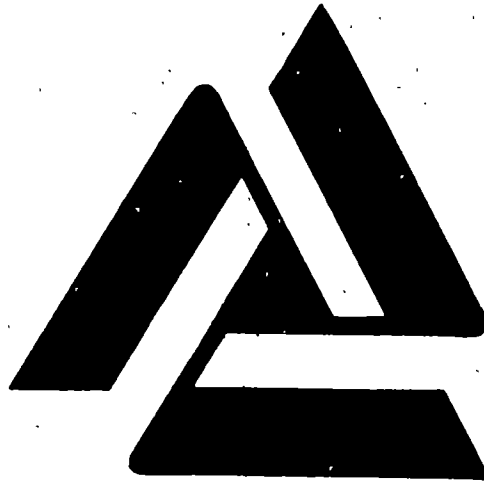
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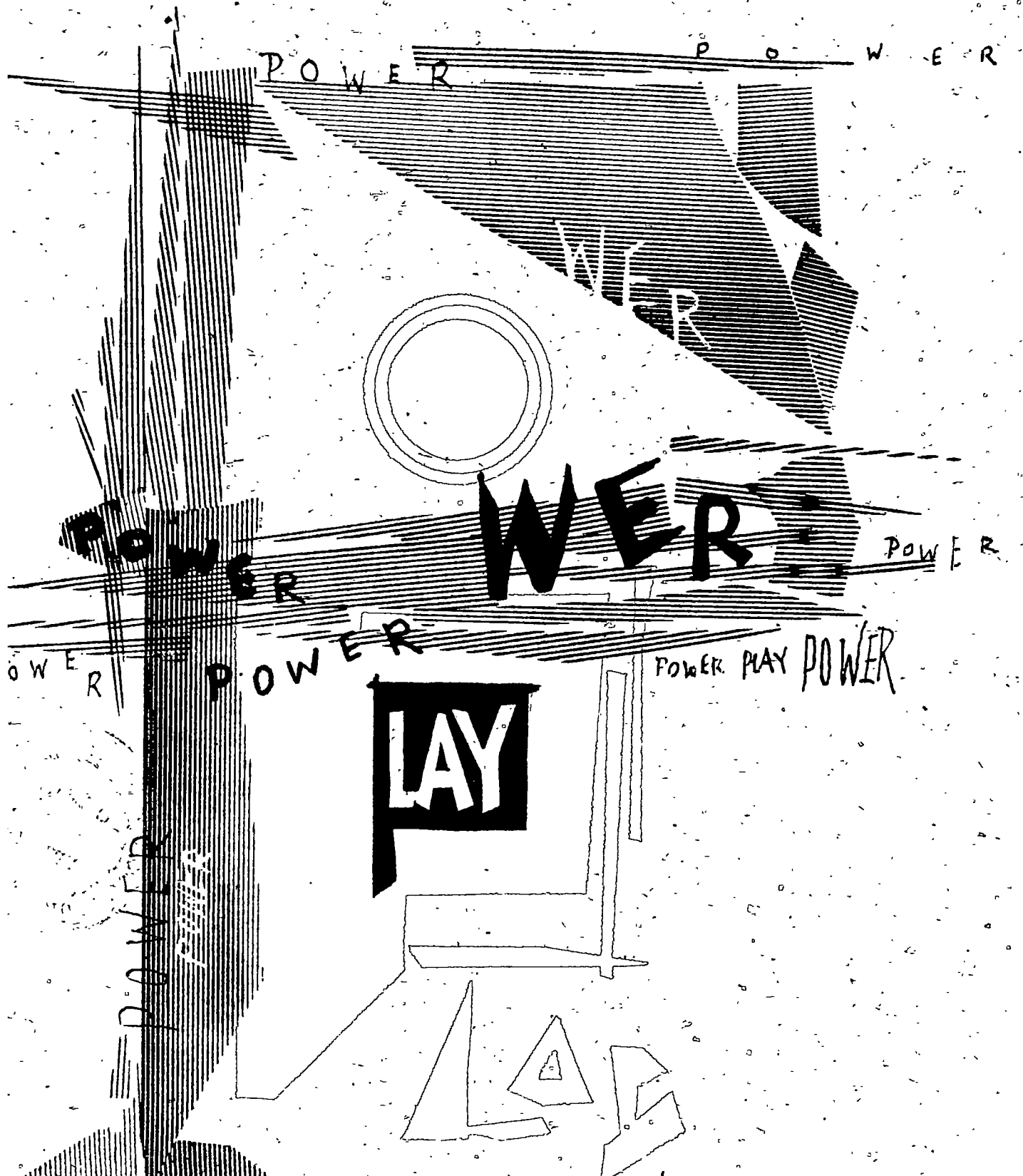


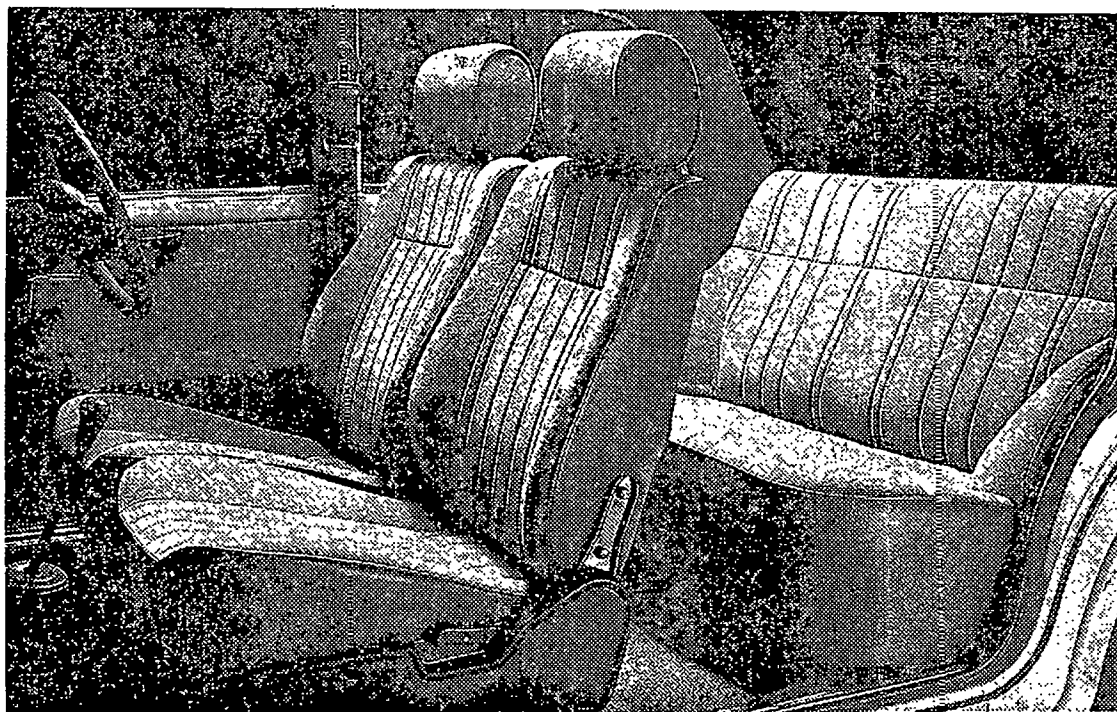
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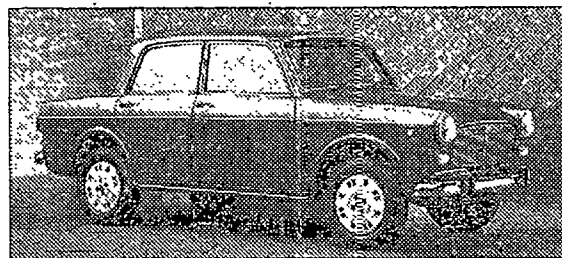
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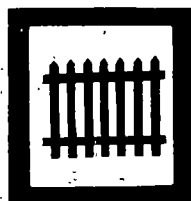
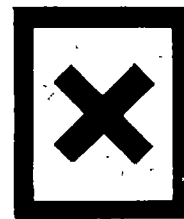


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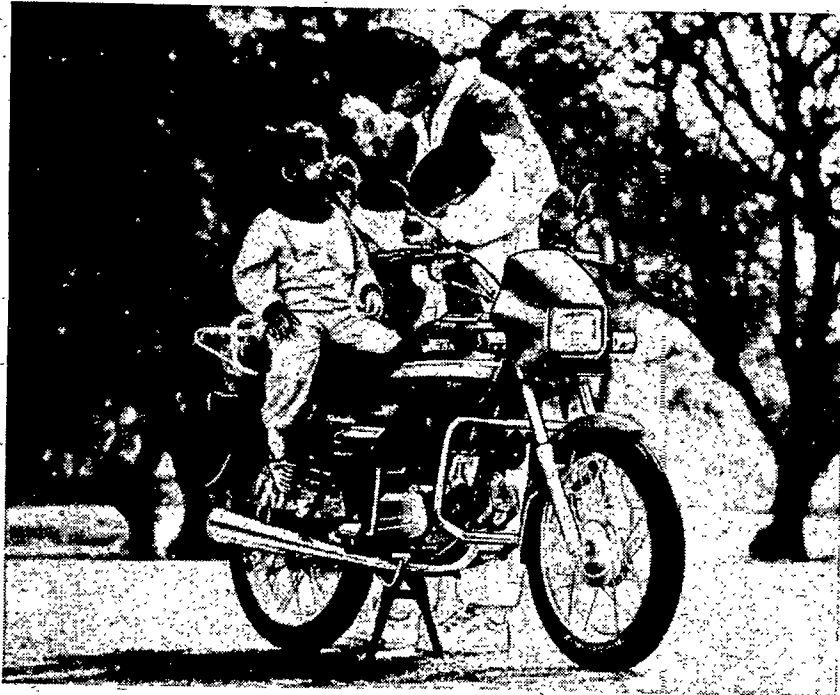
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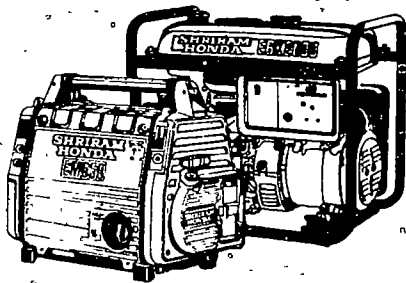
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- 12 THE PROBLEM**  
a short statement  
on the issues involved
- 15 THE WELCOME ERA OF  
COALITION POLITICS**  
Surjit S. Bhalla, President, Oxus Research and  
Investments, Delhi
- 20 SAFFRON KING, REGIONAL KNIGHTS**  
Mahesh Rangarajan, Fellow, Nehru Memorial  
Museum and Library, Delhi
- 24 THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, DARKLY...**  
Praful Bidwai, Columnist; Senior Fellow,  
Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial  
Museum and Library, Delhi
- 30 REACHING OUT**  
Radhika Ramaseshan, Special Correspondent,  
'The Telegraph'
- 35 FROM RESISTANCE TO RESIGNATION**  
M. Aslam, Department of Politics,  
University of Allahabad
- 40 EVER THE OUTSIDER**  
Pamela Philipose, Senior Editor, 'The Indian Express'
- 43 MEDIA TILTS**  
P. Sainath, journalist, Mumbai
- 46 LIMITS TO SWADESHI**  
C. Rammanohar-Reddy, Deputy Editor,  
'The Hindu', Chennai
- 50 ALLIANCES '98**  
Chandrika Parmar, Centre for the Study of  
Developing Societies, Delhi
- 56 BOOKS**  
Reviewed by Bibek Debroy, Seminarist,  
Archana Prasad, Subhashini Ali, Harsh Sethi,  
Anandita Mukhopadhyay, Bharat Karnad and Danu Roy
- 72 COMMUNICATIONS**  
Received from Vina Mazumdar, Delhi and  
Deepak K. Singh, Chandigarh
- 77 BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdhury  
of Dilip Chowdhury Associates

## The problem

FORECASTING, at the best of times, is a hazardous business. And this is more so of political forecasting. Psephologists, highly visible at the announcement of elections, expectedly become somewhat scarce once the results are declared. This time around too, despite some of the experts getting some of the numbers right, the forecasts managed to be as off the mark as they always are, particularly in their details.

The one result that everyone, pollsters and political pundits, got right was that the elections to the 12th Lok Sabha would end in a hung Parliament. Notwithstanding inflated claims by both the BJP and the Congress (particularly after Sonia Gandhi jumped into the fray), the era of single party dominance is over. No matter how derisive both these parties were (and are) of coalitional experiments like the United Front, the fact remains that the only way any party can hope to rule Delhi is by structuring a pattern of pre- and post-poll alliances.

Nevertheless, the 1998 elections to the Lok Sabha, in some significant ways do mark a watershed. The most important is that the claim of our oldest political party, one that led the struggle for Independence, as the only genuine pan-Indian party now stands undermined. It is not just that the Congress has managed to lose two successive general elections, or that its representation in Parliament has remained stuck at 140. More telling is the statistic that its share of the popular vote has between 1952 and 1998 shrunk from around 45% to 25%. Similarly, from a situation where the Congress won seats from every single province in

the country, it has now been frozen out from various regions, most significantly U.P.

In the same time period, its key challenger in recent times, the BJP, has not only increased its vote share from 3.10% (1952) to 25.38% (1998), but has managed to win seats from 17 states and 4 Union Territories—a figure higher than that of the Congress with representation from 17 states and 3 Union Territories. It is also only 0.34 percentage points behind the Congress in popular vote share.

The impressive gains recorded by the BJP (a 14% increase in vote share from 1989) have to be read in conjunction with a few other indicators. For a long time the BJP (earlier Jan Sangh) was seen as a Hindi belt, urban, upper caste Hindu, trader's party, an imagery still invoked by many of its critics. Survey data reveals that the BJP today, despite electoral support from around 54% of upper caste Hindus (over 85% in U.P.) has made significant inroads among the OBCs, Dalits and tribals. Its vote share among women and minorities remains low, but a vast majority of the educated (graduates and above) and youth support the party. There is, thus, some justification as seeing it as the party of the future. More so since both the Congress and the left have, in chronological terms, a substantially older voter base.

These figures, as always, hide as much as they reveal. We have little indication of how stable and effective this voter base is. Even today, in U.P., the combined vote share of the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party is 49.6%. They also led in 64 out

of 85 constituencies. Had they fought elections together, the complexion of the Parliament would have been very different. Arithmetically, at least, the party has no reason to feel upbeat. It also needs to be remembered that the BJP, as a party of governance, has so far not managed to improve on its electoral performance after a period in office.

As significant as the 'decline' of the Congress, or the 'rise' of the BJP, is the future of the third force, the UF. Its 'national' constituent, the Janata Dal, has all but disappeared. Many of its regional partners have suffered significant reverses and, like the TDP in Andhra, may well choose other 'national partners'. Its ally, the left, has held its own, but barely. It still remains confined to its regional bases, where too its dominance is under threat. The future, on current indications of a non-Congress, non-BJP coalition playing a crucial mediatory role, cannot be said to be bright.

Through the decade of the nineties, in electoral political terms, what we have witnessed is a steady gain made by regional, often single state formations. Even in the BJP led coalition, a little over a third of the numbers come from a motley crowd of 20 allies. While the significance of such a mix for cohesive governance is regularly remarked upon, what is often missed out is that the 'natural terrain' for electoral politics is now the states, not the nation.

Except in the unusual situation of a referendum-like, swing dominated election, the patterning in the Lok Sabha is more likely to be a reflection of regional aggregation than a national mandate. Possibly, this

might also explain the increasing importance of the anti-incumbency factor. Hopefully, local factors and performance is what will matter more. It is not a mere coincidence that over half the members in the new House are first-time entrants.

In important ways such a political tendency may also help re-define conventionally held ideas of the nation, as also federalism. One suspects that respective states and regional parties will not only demand greater compliance from the centre for their regions but will equally shape the whole. This is evident in the way the BJP, arguably our most unitary party, is being forced to accommodate the concerns (both genuine and fickle) of its various allies. Or in its now foregrounding a 'national' rather than its *Hindutva* agenda.

Given our somewhat undeveloped political culture, managing messy coalitional politics is unlikely to be easy. Even in the few weeks that the new dispensation has been in power, the strains are evident. And the conflicting pressures arise not just from the allies but from the different factions of the core grouping. Claims to cohesion or unity of purpose within both the BJP and the Sangh Parivar come across as hollow. While this may well have been expected given the rapid growth of these formations in the past few years, one is entitled to be sceptical about its slogan of both stability and being a party with a difference.

The secular decline of the Congress and its vacation of the centrist political space; the inability, despite spectacular gains of the BJP to successfully replace the Congress as a party where all social segments and all

regions, at least in part, enjoy space; the steady growth of regional, sub-regional, single issue political formations with low appeal outside their core support area – in our electoral political system implies that for the foreseeable future we are likely to witness fractured verdicts, hung Parliaments and unprincipled pre- and post-poll alliances to ensure narrow and fickle majorities. Not quite designed to inculcate confidence.

A focus on electoral politics and political parties, though central to the political process, hardly exhausts the political space. Unfortunately, our political analysts, while concentrating on numbers, vote shares, swings and so on have rarely bothered to probe deeper. We, for instance, know little about the long-term implications of an increasing enmeshing of our economy with the global market. The current debates over *swadeshi*, or the posturing about the IMF-WB or the WTO, while expressing the concerns of domestic big capital (read Bombay Club) provide few clues about how different social segments and different regions will be affected. And how they will behave politically.

Equally, it is a matter of concern why everyday, real-life issues – the state of our primary education, health, food security, drinking water, shelter, or access to and control over common property resources – seem to matter so little in affecting political fortunes. Nor, it appears, does corruption. After all, the number held guilty by public opinion – from Sukh Ram to Balram Jakhar, not to mention Laloo Prasad Yadav and Jayalalitha's partymen – who won is not small.

Even more disturbing is the political role of sections of our society who do not contest elections. About business we always knew, be it as funders of different political parties or as lobbyists with government. Still, the up-front role of different business houses and associations this time around came as a surprise. Once we add foreign corporate players to this tribe, our political culture is likely to get irretrievably altered. To business, we now need to add the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the media. No longer are important strata in these various estates content at playing their traditional, constitutional roles. They are increasingly aligned to different political parties and their actions are altering the 'rules of the game' – in the process squeezing out the little space we have as voters and as citizens at demanding accountability from our rulers.

To these one should add the hitherto unmentionable in Indian politics – our military and para-military. India has, so far, escaped the fate of our various South Asian neighbours. But with an increasing recourse to the army for settling internal disputes – from riots to

terrorism – and the growing concern about territorial security, who is to say what the future portends.

What about the ordinary citizen? Is our role merely to be confined to playing at iterant voter in contests with candidates and parties in whose selection and in whose programmes we have little say? Is our only power voting out unrepresentative, unaccountable, often corrupt groupings, only to have them replaced by their clones? There is no reason to feel too despondent. For one, despite assertions to the contrary, voter turnout was a little higher in the 1998 elections. Also, it is the relatively under-privileged strata that is participating in greater numbers. They, clearly, have greater faith in the country's democratic future than does our elite, and their participation does affect political agendas.

Second, it is sheer arrogance on our part to presume that politicians are knowledge proof. Political parties, as much as political analysts, carry out surveys, minutely scrutinize electoral results and try and re-invent themselves, though more for purposes of winning rather than service. Results of the kind we have recently seen do create the impetus for a serious re-think, not only about political strategies and programmes, but about the rules of the game. Be it weeding out the corrupt from electoral politics, introduction of reforms to control defections and horse-trading, evolving parliamentary procedures, or even the election of the Speaker (despite the unseemly deals this time around) – each of these concerns is being subject to greater scrutiny and debate.

Outside the elected House – Parliament and state assemblies – citizen's groups and social movements are attempting to push pro-people agendas, fight for a right to information and so on, to ensure that our fledgling democracy, fifty years down acquires content – of representativeness, of accountability, of performance.

There is no running away from the need to re-work many of the foundational presuppositions of both our electoral and political system. Be it the parliamentary form with its first-past-the-post rule, or the relationship between the different wings of the state – too much has happened, too much has changed for us to blindly assert that the political system is healthy. But surreptitiously bringing in the agenda of re-examining the Constitution, as the BJP threatens to do, is hardly designed to inspire confidence. A viable case for a second Republic has still to be made. As we move towards the next millenium our political future remains suffused with uncertainty. This issue of *Seminar* addresses some of these concerns.

# The welcome era of coalition politics

SURJIT S BHALLA

THE mid-term 1998 elections have just ended, but it is too early for Indian politicians to take it easy. There were several losers from the elections of '98 – and a few winners. Among the losers were two: First, politicians in general, and the political clout they carry in affecting the (mis)fortunes of the electorate. Second, the major parties – Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress – have been issued notice of their increasing irrelevance.

The winners – coalition politics, 'leadership' and economic liberalization. The future, while it will revolve around the two major parties, does not belong to them. The spin, therefore, on

the just concluded elections is – may there be several more, so that we can finally gravitate towards our eventual destiny of being ruled by technocrats, as most of the world, and almost all of the developing world, already is.

*Congress loses:* Sonia Gandhi kindled hopes of revival in the GOPI (Grand – or Geriatric? Old Party of India). Old in age, and in its tired ability to generate ennui, if not revulsion. In four major states – U.P., Bihar, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal – the GOPI could obtain only six seats (out of 220), with five accruing under Bihari circumstances. Add the 38 northern seats – Jammu and Kashmir,

Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Chandigarh – and GOPI was barely able to cross a total beyond the fingers in its hands! Phrased differently, that is 12 seats for GOPI out of almost half the electorate, and a GOPI blackout in four states – U.P., Tamil Nadu, Punjab and West Bengal (1 seat).

**T**he Congress was able to retain the same number of seats it obtained in 1996 – 140 seats, and with its stated pre-poll allies, about 170 seats. There was much discussion throughout the campaign about the Sonia Gandhi effect. Her supporters argued that it was large since without her, Congress and her allies would have obtained seats in double digits. The various opinion polls conducted *before* Sonia Gandhi announced her interest in campaigning on 10 January 1998, suggested that the Congress and its allies (including only Kerala and Maharashtra and excluding RJD in Bihar) would obtain somewhere around 145-150 seats. The eventual tally, 147 seats. Thus, there seems little reason to argue that Sonia Gandhi's campaigning had a substantial effect, either way, in yielding the eventual result. (See Bhalla 1998b for detailed discussion.)

*BJP loses:* It might seem odd that the party, which has rapidly gained ascendancy and is now the party in power, should be classified as having 'lost'. The BJP gained power because of its opportunistic pre-poll alliances with several regional parties. The reason it may not be able to hold on to power is because of its opportunistic pre-poll alliances, and alliances made without any regard to ideological commonness.

But as each unfolding AIADMK moment makes clear, Jayalalitha's gain has been BJP's loss. The continuous humiliation that the BJP is undergoing at the hands of the AIADMK cannot but signal a pyrrhic victory, at

best. Initially, there were the demands for installation of ministers; now there is the demand for removal of ministers. Regardless of how the farce ends, the BJP is wounded, and will have to constantly run, not to stay ahead, but to prevent itself from falling further behind.

*The Hindu right loses:* There is some speculation that the BJP is in power today because of a fundamental shift in the preferences of the body politic towards the 'Hindu right'. The pre-poll electoral alliances, and statements by the BJP partners, suggests strongly that the fear was misplaced and the conclusion erroneous. Several leaders (e.g. Hegde of Lokshakti, Naveen Patnaik of the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa and J. Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu) had made it clear that their ideology was substantially different than the 'Hindu right' allegiances of its senior partner. Further, the various opinion polls showed that the non-Hindu right leader of the BJP, A.B. Vajpayee, was the major (and only?) reason that the electorate preferred the BJP.

**T**he elections resulted in marginal gains for the BJP overall (161 to 177 seats) and humiliation in two states that they ruled – Maharashtra (home of the Hindu right) and Rajasthan. The BJP had to play a juggling act to keep its alliance intact in the formation of the government. It needed close to 100 seats to get to the magic mark of 272. Eventually, it had to rope in the 'secular' Chandrababu Naidu and his 12 seats, and yield the Speaker's post in exchange in order to gain power. Not such an auspicious beginning to the Hindu right, indeed. Elections '98 are a most likely witness to the beginning of the end of the influence of fundamentalists – a reality in keeping with other worldwide trends.

*Swadeshi economics loses:* The Hindu right is being kept company by

another loser from the elections – the proponents of *swadeshi* economics. The BJP government has pedaled furiously to distance itself from the economic policies it espoused before the elections. These policies were based on either the ideology of the extreme left (closed markets, xenophobia) or Congress rejects (commanding heights approach). The new definition of *swadeshi* in its most extreme form – India should be built by Indians!

**T**he rejection of *swadeshi* and the consequent acceptance of the economic liberalization policies of the Congress and the United Front suggests a convergence of views. The chance of a *swadeshi* reversal of economic reform policies is therefore close to zero. This is not due to a change in ideology on the part of the BJP – rather, it is to their acceptance of the new reality of powerful markets.

The increased power and influence of markets is felt not just in India but also worldwide. Governments have to proceed along broadly international market lines. Non-market friendly pronouncements from political leaders are met with immediate reaction from the stock market, and such reactions cause politicians to change their mind. Three recent examples from the Indian stock market serve to illustrate this 'new' phenomenon.

*15 and 16 January 1998:* A section of the party leaders associated with the formulation of the BJP manifesto say that if voted to power they will insist on a lock-in period of six months for FII investment to make it clear to FIIs that they cannot 'rush in and rush out' of the country. The stock market (sensex) fell by nearly 200 points to close at 3395.04. It fell further to 3366 the day after the lock-in announcement on a bout of heavy panic sales by FIIs. The next day, senior party leader and chairman of



the party's manifesto committee, Jaswant Singh, says that there is no question of any lock-in period for FII investments in India. The party's PM-in-waiting, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said the same in a written statement to the press.

Following the party's grand retraction, the market jumped by 100 points to close at 3481 on 19 January. A clear indication of the power of the market to discipline bad politics.

**T**he third example is from after the elections. The Economic Times, a financial daily, headlined a story indicating that a BJP ally, George Fernandes, had suggested that the tax rate on the 'rich' should be increased. The market fell a 100 points in the first couple of hours before soothing statements negating Fernandes's comments were issued. It is not just that the foreign money managers react to such statements. The Indian money managers do the same. Collectively, the stock market has become a major 'check and balance' on bad politics — in India, and elsewhere. The trend will only get intensified. This is the major reason for the about-turn on swadeshi, and for convergence in economic views of all parties.

*Political instability wins — but India gains:* The electorate gains from the impasse at the center. Paradoxical? Hardly. A lot has been written about the cost that a poor country like India pays for political instability. A large part of the electoral plank of the BJP was that it was its turn to provide political stability. The Congress wisely stayed out of this hyperbole, perhaps because it recognized that it had provided precious little, besides 'stability', to the Indian population over 50 years of its own turn at power.

There are reasonable grounds to argue that political instability is good for economic reform and, via compe-

tition, leads to improved politicians, and therefore better governance. The contention is that lack of political dominance means that politicians in power would make the extra reform in order to fight for marginal votes in a future election. In other words, that they could go to the electorate with a 'good' economic record. This hypothesis was supported by the reforms of 1991-1996 led by a minority (unstable) Congress government, and by the last two years of United Front rule. Among the reform achievements of the latter were: (i) tax reform with a reduction in the maximum rate to 30 per cent; (ii) rationalization of the pricing of the important oil sector; (iii) movement, albeit painfully slow, towards privatization of the bloated and inefficient state sector; (iv) deregulation of interest rates such that only rates of 30 day and below are now regulated by the Central Bank; and (v) movement towards capital account convertibility starting with the opening up of gold imports.

*BJP pragmatism wins:* The new (and welcome) mantra of the BJP is pragmatism. Actually, there were several hints in the run-up to the elections that this was to be the new *avatar* of the BJP. In its wide choice of partners, and in its projection of Vajpayee as the PM, the BJP had more than hinted that it was the most capable of all the parties in accurately reading the future. That future consists of: (i) a decreasing influence of politicians; a substantially altered, and more important, role for regional parties; (ii) the emergence of an entirely new coalition arithmetic; (iii) an increasing role for leadership and national leaders; (iv) an increasing role for international consensus and international markets in the formulation of economic policy.

*Politicians — need for change:* Several opinion polls over the last few years have suggested that of all the people in public life, those held in low-

est regard are the politicians and policemen. This breakdown in public authority is a subject for another occasion. At present, it is important for political parties and analysts to draw the right implications. This breakdown suggests that the politician will have to change her appeal in order to win future elections. Out go platitudes of helping the poor, and increasingly, of helping your caste. On the former, the poor have seen the naked reality continue, and on the latter, every party fields a caste-correct candidate in most constituencies. With the rapid development of information and communication technology, the voter is well aware of both his rights and his expectations. Delivery on promises assumes centre-stage as the voter shops around for the best deal.

*Regional parties — a competitive role:* As the voter goes shopping around, it is only natural that he would gravitate towards local politicians. The notion of a national party ruling the roost died with the commanding heights economy. This is a lesson that BJP learnt, but not (to date) the Congress. There is perhaps nothing more suicidal than a party that is both old and arrogant — attributes of GOPI as it clings to the notion that all it needs is charisma to get back to 220+ seat totals.

**A** little noticed development in the recent elections was the phenomenon of two-way fights everywhere. While at the national level, there seemed to be a *pot-pourri* of parties and alliances, the voter reduced them to straight two-party affairs at the constituency (and state) level. As forecast by almost all the opinion and exit polls (no Tamil Nadu surprise here), there was a virtual elimination of the low-brow national parties, i.e. Janata Dal (JD) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The trend was complete with

the JD having broken up into state parties in Orissa (BJD) and Bihar (RJD).

This trend towards two-way battles suggests pointers to future coalitions and strategies. The two national parties – BJP and Congress – will have to rethink, with such soul searching being more mandatory for Congress. The emerging reality is not only of two-way fights at the constituency level, but also at the *national* level. This is because on both political and economic issues, there is a broad convergence of views. Today, the CPM is for economic liberalization, the Congress is against corruption, and the Hindutva obsession of the BJP is a relic of a bygone era.

**T**he alliances that will be formed in the next election are likely to involve considerably more homogeneity of views than in the last election. While it would be interesting to note whether Jayalalitha will find any national partners, it will be the case that alliances with other regional parties will have a ring of permanence and a common ideology to them. This, in the case of Congress, will mean a new approach. Alliance with its major ‘enemy’ in West Bengal, and perhaps with Naidu in Andhra, and TMC-DMK in Tamil Nadu will have to be worked out. But on what basis can two major contestants be on the same side?

*The new coalition math:* The following is a ‘suggested arithmetic’ for managing coalitions in the 21st century. The eventual math is not known, but it is unlikely to deviate much from the calculus outlined below. Assume for purposes of illustration that GOPI and Naidu decide to get together for the next election. If fairness and competition are guideposts, then the following seat adjustment formula suggests itself: seats are allocated to each party at some fraction (say three-fourths) of its previous election win-

nings. In these seats, selected on the basis of highest margin of victory first, the ‘other’ party would not set up a candidate. In the other (one-fourth) seats the rule would be ‘Let the best woman win’.

**T**his formula allows for cooperation and competition. The voter will know that there is a basic alliance, a common ideology, a common enemy, and a clear choice. He can either gravitate to the BJP+ camp or the Congress+ camp. Individual politicians will have a greater desire to perform, and to keep margins high. Such high margins will mean a relatively free-run at the time of the next election. Note that this formula works for future elections as well.

The above formula breaks down when an alliance is sought with a partner who gained very few (or zero) seats in the last election – e.g. Congress in U.P. and West Bengal, BJP in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. While somewhat different, the principle stays the same. The zero or weak party can suggest that its base level be what it has obtained in the last two, or three, elections. Also, considerations of the number of ministers at the Centre can form a basis of negotiation.

Besides such seat arrangements, the two national parties will also have to come to grips with the issue of ‘leadership’. The BJP needs no pointers in this direction, since it correctly assessed the need of the voter to ‘believe’ in a leader. It offered the likable and non-emotive persona of Vajpayee. What did the Congress do? In its arrogance and/or stupidity, it decided to contest the elections without a leader! Instead, it offered to the public the ‘gift’ of the Congress Working Committee’s divine choice of a leader *after* the election. That this is not ex-post chatter was indicated by

me in an article entitled ‘Has the Congress Lost its Head?’ Economic Times, 6 January 1998. In that article, I pointed out that a no-brainer policy of choosing a leader, any leader, was more desirable than Congress’s present choice of several pretenders. The voters wanted leadership, and collective leadership was an idea that most voters thought went away with the Berlin Wall, if not with Mao and Stalin.

**I**f one is thinking leadership, then one needs to consider the following ‘counter-factuals’. How many people would have voted for the BJP if Vajpayee was *not* its Prime Ministerial candidate? How many people would have voted for the Congress if it did not have a few unimpeachable leaders like Manmohan Singh? The Congress had its own home-grown alternative to Vajpayee. It chose not to market its brightest star, at a time when the electorate wanted little else than an honest and efficient politician. If GOPI has to win the next election, it needs to think and strategize now about how to play and market its major assets – Sonia Gandhi, Manmohan Singh and Pawar?

*The importance of being Tamil Nadu:* This election was marked by the fact that, excluding Tamil Nadu, the analysts, the pundits, opinion polls and exit polls got each part of the elephant right. Some had forecast that BJP+ would actually win in Maharashtra and Rajasthan (Door-darshan exit poll) – two states where they were actually routed. Others (TVI exit poll) were on the money in these two states, and others, but were off by a considerable margin in assessing the BJP+ seats at the national level (208 vs. the actual level of 250). How can this be possible, i.e. get a three-way classification right in almost all states and still be wrong in the aggregate? The

answer lies in Tamil Nadu. Consider the following: TVI exit poll forecast for BJP+ was 208 and that of Doordarshan 252. Excluding Tamil Nadu, TVI forecast was 205 and Doordarshan, 248. The result excluding T.N. — BJP+ got 220 seats. Suddenly, the TVI poll is the more accurate one!

**T**he AIADMK sweep was most unexpected, and this surprise is in large part responsible for the larger-than-life clout that it now has with the central government. If the 'sweep' was expected, it would have been part of the pre-poll calculation and would not have been able to bite, or sting.

How much of a surprise was the AIADMK victory? It is not an exaggeration to state that this victory was the most unexpected in all Indian elections conducted to date, and perhaps even in the world. There have been other surprises. The most recent 'major' surprise was that yielded by the elections in England in 1992 when Major embarrassed the pollsters and won. There was only an 8% unexpected swing, but a magnitude large enough for there to be a national commission of inquiry. In the case of Tamil Nadu 1998 (T.N. 98), the unexpected swing is at a state level, and of a magnitude two and a half times higher — about 20 per cent. What is also peculiar about T.N. 98 is that no one — not one out of a dozen opinion polls, three exit polls including one exclusively T.N. poll, analysts of all hues, politicians of all colors, and journalists of all stripes — count them, not one soul (including the AIADMK supremo, J. Jayalalitha) had forecast that the AIADMK-BJP alliance would get 10 seats, let alone the 30 out of 39 that they eventually obtained.

The most favoured hypothesis about why the whole class failed is that there was a late swing effect due to the Coimbatore bomb blast which occurred on 14 February, with elections

in Tamil Nadu on 16 and 21 February. While appealing, this explanation fails when confronted with the exit poll evidence. All the three exit polls — Doordarshan, TVI and The Hindu — forecast only 3 to 4 seats for AIADMK-BJP. Note that the Hindu poll was a state level exit poll only (hence expected to be fairly accurate), and conducted by one of the most reputable newspapers in India. What happened?

**T**here are two possibilities, and both are exceedingly weak explanations. The exit polls got it wrong because random sampling is a genuine problem for exit polls. (But they got it right everywhere else?) The exit polls, analysts, and pundits got it wrong because the Tamilians collectively lied to whoever asked them a question. Note that all the opinion polls got it right while getting it wrong because of the Coimbatore blast. (For the record, out of about ten constituencies sampled by the Doordarshan and TVI exit polls, in no more than two was the AIADMK-BJP alliance registering even a close victory).

There is one other state with a large surprise — Bihar. Most, if not all analysts, opinion polls, and exit polls were predicting a rout for the RJD-Congress alliance. Instead, the two parties garnered 23 out of the 54 seats. Not as large a surprise as T.N., but close. The explanation for this 'surprise' is that in Bihar, unfair commercial practices (ballot stuffing or the purchase of polling booth officials) is likely to have played a large part. Why this explanation cannot also partly apply to Tamil Nadu is not clear.

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# Saffron king, regional knights

MAHESH RANGARAJAN

BY the time the contours of the results of the general elections of 1998 became clear, the United Front was out of the race. The Congress was having teething trouble in making a bid for power. But what sealed the deal for the saffron-led combine was the attitude of two key regional satraps. Even before the elections, J. Jayalalitha had roped together a clutch of smaller parties in Tamil Nadu and entered into a historic electoral pact with the Bharatiya Janata Party. The sweeping victory this alliance won in the southern state tipped the scales for the BJP, not only offsetting its significant setbacks in its erstwhile strongholds in western India but pushing its total tally in the South to 50 out of 132 seats. Since 1991, no party that has held power on a stable basis at the Centre has been

able to do so without a firm base in the South.

But the key change in the post-poll line-up was that of the former convener of the United Front, N. Chandrababu Naidu. Following the maxim that an enemy's enemy is a friend, he pulled away from the Front, adopted a neutral stance and then finally asked his MPs to vote for Vajpayee in the all-important vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha. India now has a BJP-led government but the real question of questions remains unanswered. Has there indeed been a major shift of power away from all-India parties towards regional players?

In one sense the verdict of 1998 was kinder to national level parties than the previous one. In 1996, the Congress and the BJP had polled just

around half the votes cast. That proportion did not change in any significant way this time. But the new alliances forged by these parties, especially those cobbled together by the BJP, made all the difference. The Congress and the Vajpayee-led fronts now polled a total of over two-thirds of the votes cast. The space occupied by the regional party dominated United Front shrank sharply. In particular, the Federal Front, which had as many as 59 seats in the previous House was cut down to just 21 members. This, as much as electoral compulsions of checkmating the Congress, weighed heavily on the leadership of the Telugu Desam party in casting its lot with the BJP. Better to pursue a regionalist agenda within a front led by an all-India party than stay out in the cold. This, in turn, points to another change brought about by the United Front experience: regional parties now want a share of power at the national level, indirectly if necessary and directly if possible. Rallying against the Centre is not enough. They now want to have a go at running the country.

**A**ny discussion of regional parties has to begin by distinguishing between different kinds of parties. First are the formations from smaller states such as those in the North East which would like to be on the right side of any regime in power at the Union government level. Simply put, they need the cash, and in cases of insurgency, the troops. In this sense, small hill states are a force for centralisation. This enabled the breakaway Congress parties in both Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh to link up with the BJP. Next are the rich peasant-led groups in Haryana and Punjab for whom the Congress is a major competitor for votes. Significantly, the Akali Dal in Punjab has a close work-

ing relationship with the BJP despite having a very different view of the Hindu-Sikh relationship that emphasises cultural distinctions as opposed to being part of a larger Hindu community. In Haryana, both the Bansi Lal and Chauthala-led groups are now with the saffron combine. But the really significant regional parties are those that exist in the larger states of the Union. It is at this level that there was a major change in 1998.

**R**egional parties were able to play a central role in the making of the Deve Gowda government in 1996 in a very specific situation, where the Congress had lost the mandate to rule and the BJP appeared to be a threat to state level autonomy. It was possible for them to rely on Congress support to gain control of the Centre but virtually suicidal to contemplate extending support to it. The BJP also gained due to the inability of the United Front to retain a distinct identity in the aftermath of the verdict. Once the question became one of either backing the Congress or joining hands with it, it was going to be very difficult if not impossible to retain the regional parties in the old battle formation. *Hindutva* stepped in to fill the breach in the wall.

Of course, not all regional formations have a stable history or a long-term basis. Even the stronger ones may have to pay a heavy price for the tactical choices they have now made. Lok Shakthi in Karnataka won only three out of 28 seats. It also cohabits with a strong local unit of the BJP which has now established a significant presence in all the three regions of the state. In Orissa, the saffron combine has made major headway in recruiting support among the tribals and the OBCs in the western districts, and may in the medium term overwhelm the Biju Janata Dal. But there are other, stronger players as well in

the saffron camp. Mamata Banerjee and her new found friends do need each other but the nature of her support base is such that it includes large numbers of the very minorities that the BJP may well target as 'infiltrators' in the future.

*The voice of Chennai:* If Bengal is a region with a strong sense of identity, Chennai is the only place in India other than Srinagar where the radio announcers do not say 'Akashvani'. For decades, they have said 'Chennai valu nilayam' or the 'Voice of Chennai'. It is here that the bonus seats for the BJP and its allies may turn out to be a mixed blessing. The lady is clearly not for turning. In the first round of the drama for choosing a new PM, she deftly reminded her ally how vital her party was by delaying the submission of a letter of support to the President. Next, she ensured that as many as eight ministers were from Tamil Nadu in the first round of ministry formation. Her own party managed to bag key posts in economic ministries including finance. Her priorities are clearly specific to her own party and to her own state: the dismissal of the DMK government is a must.

**T**his itself points to how Janus-faced regionalism can be. The AIADMK manifesto of 1998 is perhaps the most explicitly federalist it has ever been in tone or content. It calls for 'autonomy for each state and a federation of states at the Centre.' But in her attack on the DMK, Jayalalitha is willing to play a clearly pro-Centre role, asking for the use of powers under Article 356. The state government, in turn, is put on the defensive on the issue of the rise of terrorism and communal violence in the state. The Union government is playing a cat and mouse game. Not a week passes by without contradictory statements and demands on the matter of dismissal. Again, a regional force, for

its own reasons favours an interventionist federal regime.

**T**he pressures on her party's inner circle were no less than those playing on the minds of the BJP. The party has been out of power for nearly two years. It managed to wrest victory by forging alliances with smaller groups, some of which have been its opponents and adversaries in the recent past. The Patalli Makkal Kakshi with its social base among the Vanniyars of northern Tamil Nadu strikes at the very roots of the claims of the two larger Dravidian parties to speak for the Mandal classes in the state. The MDMK is led by an ambitious and young leader, V. Gopalsamy, with a mind and plans of his own which may well bring him into conflict with the reigning deity of the AIADMK in the future.

What keeps them together is a common dislike of Karunanidhi. If one adds up the votes, the DMK-led combine polled only four per cent less votes than the Jayalalitha led bandwagon. At the moment, all is well in the latter's camp but should an Assembly election come up before schedule, she will have a hard time working out seat-sharing arrangements with her allies. Put together the Lok-Sabha results in the state and the smaller allies won in over 45 Assembly segments. They are bound to demand their share of the cake from the AIADMK in the next Assembly polls, opening a Pandora's box.

It is now commonplace to point to problems that exist at the national level, of the inability of larger entities to impose their will and of the inevitability of smaller players exercising enormous clout. This fragmenting of the polity also exists at a regional level. In Tamil Nadu, the rise of a new Dalit party ensured the rout of the DMK-TMC candidates in at least two

constituencies, Sivakasi and Tenkasi. This points to a more complex situation on the ground than existed over the past three decades. The degree of self-assertion among classes, communities and castes is making various parties and leaders re-assess their strategies. In an increasingly fluid situation, it will become much more difficult to craft stable social alliances.

*The view from Banjara Hills:* But the man from Hyderabad took a different view of things. Chandrababu Naidu fought the elections on an anti-Congress and anti-BJP platform. His main refrain was simple: to work for Andhra Pradesh he needed more than the 17 MPs he had won the last time round. For a party in power since 1994, the Telugu Desam did creditably. Along with its allies, it managed to get about as many votes as the Congress party.

**B**ut there was a major shift in terms of where Naidu got his MPs. Since its founding in 1983, it has been a party with its strongest base in the coastal districts, but here it won only a single seat. Instead, it was in Telengana, which has a sizable Muslim presence and is traditionally a Congress bastion, that he struck gold. The real gains in the state were made by the BJP which not only won four seats but polled over 18 per cent of the votes. Interestingly, the Kapus and the Kammas, both among the support base of the TDP, showed clear inclinations of moving towards the saffron party.

What played on Naidu's mind was the possibility of having to contend with an unfriendly regime at the Centre. Much of the last three years has been spent rolling back on the very promises that swept N.T. Rama Rao back to power. The rice subsidy has been cut and prohibition lifted. By official admission over four out of five

cotton farmers lack access to institutional credit, making them highly vulnerable to economic adversity as was the case with the spate of suicides in Telengana. All this needs money, and the coffers in the state are almost empty. It is also possible that the very persistence of the Congress on the ground makes an accord with the BJP a distinct possibility.

**T**he problems with such a course of action are no less complicated than those faced by J. Jayalalitha. Until now the Telugu Desam has had a remarkably good equation with Muslims. This was partly due to its creditable record in handling instances of communal violence. It has also been backed up by signs of serious attention to educational and economic problems affecting Muslim communities in Andhra Pradesh. But a resurgent BJP is building on its old bases and creating new nuclei for future expansion. It is also not clear how the state's increasingly vocal Dalits will take to a close linkage between the regional forces and the saffron party. Though the new course has been defended in the name of 'political compulsions' there is no doubt the risks are as high as the potential rewards.

*Fragmentation or realignment?* Since the elections of 1989 no party has won a clear majority to rule the country. Since 1990 there have been at least two major platforms claiming to be the focus for a realignment of forces. One was the Mandal platform, centred on reservations but extending well beyond to changing the social composition of the political class itself. The other was the Mandir agenda which focuses on the need to unify all Hindus and to transform the idiom of Indian politics in line with 'cultural nationalism'. There has been a third platform of federalism. Added to the issues of affirmative action (that

include Dalit and Adivasi concerns) or of redefining nationhood (the saffron way or in other ways) was the question of centre-state relations. In turn, this is only part of a wider rubric of problems such as how the various regions of the country are to relate to the Union and to one another. Since 1990, whoever ruled India had to fashion a response to these mutually contradictory agendas. Even those out of power had to dovetail their strategies in the face of new realities.

**E**ach agenda can claim at least partial victory. The Mandal process has now set in so deeply in the polity and in society that it can only be slowed down but not reversed. In Bihar, both the Congress and the BJP had to ally with the children of the Mandal project to gain victory at the hustings. No doubt, the former is a pale shadow of its former self while the latter is a growing force, but the BJP too needs the support of a Nitish Kumar. Similarly, the absence of the priestly classes in the senior line-up of the Congress at the national level is surely a significant marker of social change.

The BJP has been much slower to change at its apex but at the state level, the ascendancy of a Kalyan Singh or an Uma Bharati points to a churning in its ranks. Here, the limitations of the Mandalisation process as it has worked out cannot be lost sight of. The change in the social composition of the political class was to have been only one part of a wider set of social changes. But at least in northern India, the splintering of these groups and their own rifts with the Dalits have made a hegemonic project a difficult enterprise. The old order has gone but the new is yet to fully replace it.

So too with Mandir. The BJP has indeed emerged as a formidable force polling one-fifth of the popular vote

in 1991 and 1996 and over one in four votes cast in India in 1998. It has also broken out of the post-Ayodhya isolation that had been its bane until 1996. Its new allies ensure that as an ideological formation it can proceed ahead with its cultural project in parts of the country and among social segments that had earlier been downright hostile to it. But to govern the country with the help of allies has required it to limit its sights for now. Its allies remain a problem, especially those whose vision of linguistic regions incorporates the minorities in a manner very different from that of political Hindutva. And in Uttar Pradesh the party, despite major gains, still remains apprehensive of a possible tie-up of the Dalit and Mandalite parties. Power itself is a problem for it threatens to wipe away the claim of being a party with a difference.

**R**egionalism in turn has won ground. No one seriously questions the nationalist credentials of regional parties anymore. Even a BJP chief minister like Bhairon Singh Shekhawat wants a larger share of the central tax revenues than any Union government is willing to contemplate. State parties have the power to make or even unmake Union governments. But the story does not go further than that. The financial and constitutional system is still geared towards a strong Centre. A shift of fortunes, and the BJP as well as the Congress would pin their hopes on such a shift, may put the Union on a stronger footing again. It is also clear that regional parties have yet to articulate a vision of a different kind of India the way the Congress did with a centralized polity as far back as 1928 in the Nehru Report.

In 1998, the three-way division of the polity showed signs of slipping into a two-way mould. But it is too early yet to speak of a two party sys-

tem. The fact is that Congress shows little signs of being able to incorporate, as it once did, the spectrum of interest groups, classes and communities of this vast country. Even a secular platform will require it to be far more accommodative of other political groups and of new social classes.

**T**he BJP hopes to use the unique combination of its alliance system and of its control of state power to replace the Congress as the fulcrum of the political system. But this will call for governance of a sort that is easy to contemplate but difficult to achieve. It will also have to smooth over conflicts with some of its own partners, which are likely to be accentuated by the exercise of power. The United Front, though now over in the sense of being a stable entity, will still play a role, if only a supportive one, in the continuing realignment of forces.

Equally important are assertive groups like the Dalits, one-fourth of whom nation-wide voted for a party other than the three major formations. Increasingly, as the right to vote and the power to exercise it devolve downward in society, these actors will come into play ever more prominently than in the past.

Regional forces are playing a larger role than ever before. But their powers are not limitless. A determined national party can and will try to divide and chip away at their bases. In turn, the political churning at the grassroots can undermine the satraps in their home bases. In the new context of post-1990 India, the genies are out of the bottle. Neither the saffron king nor the regional knights can rest easy. After all, in the past the threat to the former often came as much from the satraps as from the enemy outside the ramparts. The future, for all its promise, is an uncertain and unpredictable one.

# Through the looking glass, darkly...

PRAFUL BIDWAI

PERHAPS the most remarkable fact about the 1998 elections is that they produced a government led by a political current which had at best a distant relationship with the freedom movement – indeed, which in some ways questioned the fundamentals of the project which that movement had set itself. This constitutes not a generational shift, but a political fire-break, a change that is far more profound than the rise of the Janata Party to power in 1977 in place of the Indian National Congress which had been India's 'natural' party of government for the 30 years since Independence.

This political shift is not only a marker in the long process of historic decline of the Congress. It also reflects changes, both in the character of the Indian middle class elite and in the larger society, confirming and consolidating some of the major trends that have reshaped this polity, regionalisation being one of the most important. And yet, the shift does not represent a clear, decisive, victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party, even less for its sectarian, ultra-chauvinist, exclusivist ideology of *Hindutva*. Nor does it indicate its 'normalisation' as a mainstream political party evolving towards moderation and consensual politics. The Indian political system remains multipolar, coalitional, marked by immense complexity, divergence and heterogeneity. Under several contradictory processes and drives, and amidst continuing social

turmoil, it faces an uncertain future. A certain kind of instability, reflected in four hung Parliaments in a row, may remain endemic to it for some time.

To take a look at the broad national trends, the Congress has managed to retain its 1996 tally of seats, although its vote has fallen by more than three percentage points. It can claim that its decline may have been arrested, at least for the time being (although a disaggregated regional analysis reveals a more uneven, complicated picture). The BJP has gained five percentage points in votes, but its seat gain has been more modest. The United Front has taken a bad beating, although the left has not done (relatively speaking) too badly.

Beyond this, there was no wave, no overwhelming national trend in the elections. The voter made his/her decision on a range of considerations, many of them regional or state specific. It is impossible to analyze the results without going into state-specific factors. The reasons why the BJP lost badly in Maharashtra, more or less stagnated in Uttar Pradesh, and did well in Karnataka are entirely different, being rooted in caste, class and community configurations and developments unique to each situation. Nor do the outcomes in Tamil Nadu and Orissa derive from a national level trend.

Over two-thirds of the BJP-led front's gains have come from its regional allies. Indeed, a sizable pro-



portion of the BJP's own gains outside of its 'traditional' bases, e.g. in Orissa, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, came through alliances with regional parties. The real movers and shakers, and gainers, of the 1998 elections were the regional parties.

This strongly regional character of the vote is not new. Regionalisation has been in evidence for over a decade. Between 1984 and 1996, regional parties doubled their share of votes and seats in the Lok Sabha at the expense of national parties. The trend is reflected in the birth and expansion of the Telugu Desam and Asom Gana Parishad in the eighties, and the Samajwadi and Samata parties and Tamil Maanila Congress in the nineties. Even the latest versions, such as Trinamul Congress and Haryana Lok Dal (Chautala) are essentially regional in character.

**T**he 8% rise in the vote of the BJP plus allies derives from this phenomenon. It would therefore be wrong to oversimplify the present situation of flux and uncertainty and postulate trends towards certainty, e.g. a cyclical swing away from a regional party-dominated system to a 'national' system. It would be equally wrong to counterpoise regionalisation to the growth of influence of national parties; this is not a zero sum game.

This does not, of course, mean that the BJP has not made significant political gains in 1998 in relation to 1996. It has. For one, it has to an appreciable extent overcome the 'untouchability' or 'pariah' factor. In 1996, no one other than its pre-election allies, the Shiv Sena and the Akali Dal, was prepared to join hands with it. Today, it has the nominal, if opportunist, support of 20-odd parties, many of them non-communal, with little affinity for Hindu sectarian politics. This gain came at a very high cost: opportunist

compromises, erosion of coherence and credibility and, to an extent, the likely shrinking of the BJP's own social base. But its reality cannot be denied.

For another, the BJP has broken out of the confines of its 'heartland' – the North and the West – and acquired a presence in all the states of the South barring Kerala, spread to the East and into the Jammu region and, not least, even opened its account in the North East, e.g., surprisingly in Meghalaya. True, its presence in some states, e.g. Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, remains contingent upon its regional allies. But it is a significant gain nevertheless.

And for a third, the BJP has managed to project Atal Behari Vajpayee – a weak, communally compromised leader of modest accomplishments and no particular vision – as some kind of elder statesman and liberal, the most acceptable-to-the-middle-class face of the *Sangh Parivar*, with whom many petty bourgeois layers can identify and bond as 'one of us', a person who displays some of the superficial habits and forms of tolerance not usually associated with the more austere, humourless, hard-core, fanatical RSS types.

**B**ut it would be wrong to view the BJP's greater acceptance among the middle class and its vote gain as an endorsement of the Hindutva ideology. Although the BJP election manifesto – undoubtedly the longest, most considered, if also the most objectionable manifesto of all parties – was an elaboration of this ideology, the party's campaign had little to do with it except in a few highly charged communalised pockets. People appear to have voted as they did for the BJP and its allies on account of 'secular' considerations such as misgovernance and lack of accountability of incumbents, or chang-

ing caste equations and the collapse of centrist parties – not because of Hindutva.

The BJP's own allies, barring the Shiv Sena, refused to endorse its Ayodhya, Article 370 and Uniform Civil Code demands. They detached these issues from their campaigns, or they openly criticized the BJP's stand. The hastily put together post-election National Agenda for Governance too skips these issues, although it repeats the BJP manifesto's formulations on the nuclear weapons issue and on the question of a 'review' of the Constitution. Thus, it is ludicrous to talk of a new 'Hindu awakening' or 'self-assertion' underlying the BJP's 179 seat tally. The BJP is fantasizing if it thinks that a largely negative vote, in which divisions among its opponents played a huge role, is an endorsement of Hindutva.

**T**here is no evidence that the anti-incumbency factor, where it was present, operated differently for the BJP than for its opponents. For instance, the electorate was rather soft on the Left Front in Kerala and West Bengal and the TDP in Andhra, but delivered a blistering rebuke to the BJP-Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and Rajasthan in straight contests. Indeed, the BJP-Sena reversal in Maharashtra was in some ways more dramatic than the Tamil Nadu setback to the DMK-TMC.

Maharashtra and, to an lesser extent, Rajasthan, strongly confirm a major trend: the BJP in power tends to get quickly discredited; it cannot guarantee state-level stability. Gujarat, U.P., M.P., Delhi, Haryana and Punjab have repeatedly demonstrated this in the past. The BJP may win power in states primarily as a result of the Congress's decline. But it can rarely retain power for any length of time. Corruption, casteism and inability to carry plebeian layers of the population

with it often lead to the BJP's rapid isolation. Wherever the BJP—or its former *ayatar*, Jana Sangh — has wielded power, it has been no less venal and open to criminal influences than the Congress. And it has rarely proved stable or durable. Compare this with the left in West Bengal, which is the sole political force in India to have been returned to power in six consecutive elections in a major state—an unmatched example of stability.

**M**any commentators have been tempted to see in the post-election scenario signs of emergence of a two-party system, centred on the Congress and the BJP. This is largely an illusion. The two together have won only 320 seats; the rest (219, or two-fifths) have gone to other, mainly regional, parties. This latter is too large a proportion to permit easy generalization and oversimplification of India's highly, uniquely complex, political evolution. The BJP can weakly claim to have been a steadily growing force over the past decade or so, although its overall vote suffered a slight decline from 21 to 20 percent between 1991 and 1996. However, despite its electoral gains, its strength today is much less than the Congress's 193 seats in 1991, when that party was widely recognized as being on a downhill slope. The BJP is very, very far away from emerging as the pivot of Indian politics or, as it would crave to claim, an inheritor of the Congress tradition. It is a party on the extremity of our political spectrum, with a base whose narrowness bears no comparison with that of the Congress.

On the other hand, the regionalisation process has advanced. The political weight and bargaining power of regional groupings has improved. What we now have is *not* a two party system with a number of satellites, but a complex multipolar system, with

diverse tendencies and groupings contending within terms defined by non-communal concerns and issues. The UF has split twice in two years, and one of its main—originally its biggest—components, the Janata Dal, has collapsed. But there still exists the core of a third pole around the Left Front and regional parties, including the Samajwadi Party. There are also independent, if weak, forces such as the Bahujan Samaj and Republican parties which cannot be written off. With a shift in political equations, such a pole could rapidly grow. The fact that the Samata, Biju Janata Dal, AIADMK and the Lok Shakti have a purely tactical alliance with the BJP and could easily desert it, cannot be underrated.

**N**or has the BJP moved in the direction of 'normalizing' or 'Congressising' itself, except in the negative sense of becoming brazenly unscrupulous in the pursuit of power, and being highly corrupt and criminalised. The other sense of the term refers to the Congress's earlier role, as a national umbrella party based on a relatively broad social coalition comprising a scattering of the upper castes and the 'core minorities' (Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis), which attempted conciliation between competing interests and agendas within a co-optationist framework defined by the Nehruvian paradigm.

In this sense, the BJP has not even begun to 'Congressise' itself. It remains extremely narrowly based, both socially and geographically. Unlike the centrist Congress, the BJP is a right-wing, hierarchical, elitist party. The Congress has played around with identities—caste, religion, language—but this was not central to its strategy of political mobilization. The BJP is obsessed with identity politics and dependent on it. It can never move out of the narrow confines of retrograde

Hindu-supremacism. Its politics is deeply divisive, and rooted in exclusion and hatred. It can never be genuinely inclusive and consensual.

**O**f course, the BJP has acquired a great deal of resilience, and has learned to speak in many voices and many tongues. It has exploited its timely tactical regional alliances to great advantage. But its Hindutva core remains intact, which defines its long-term agenda. The BJP is not about to transform itself. It remains a grave threat to democracy, pluralism and secularism.

The BJP could well grow through successful alliance-making, and later finessing, of its allies. It could consolidate its upper caste votes in the South and the East, as it did in the North. But it could also equally plausibly decline through an erosion of its popular, especially OBC, vote, and through sectarian policies that repel its 'middle ground' supporters who are not hard-core communalists. The BJP is a party whose future no longer lies in its own hands: it lies with the opponents, and will be determined by the way they choose to exercise their options.

The BJP remains in thrall of the RSS. The RSS—its mentor, ideological master, organizational gatekeeper, and the final arbiter of its fate—is not about to mutate into a normal, democratic organization accountable to some public agency. It will remain a semi-secret society or cabal. The entire process of formation of the Vajpayee government clearly demonstrated the overwhelming power of the RSS over the BJP. The RSS, by its own admission, was involved in 'consultations' over the allotment of key portfolios to BJP ministers. It exercised its veto against Cabinet berths for Jaswant Singh—whose name was taken off the list hours before the March 19 swearing in—and Pramod

Mahajan, who deserted the Advani faction for the Vajpayee group a year ago. (Vajpayee was acutely embarrassed, but helpless.)

**T**he cornering of key portfolios such as human resource development, information and broadcasting, and home by BJP-RSS hardliners is an indication of the likely moves of the Sangh in the coming months. Through these pivotal positions, the RSS is certain to appoint its men and women to important posts in ministries and specialized institutions such as the Indian Councils of Social Science and Historical Research, the Sahitya and Sangeet Natak Akademis, various cultural bodies, the Archaeological Survey of India, committees on textbooks and syllabi, Doordarshan, All India Radio, and Prasar Bharati. It will also use its influence to secure favourable appointments for its nominees in the privately owned media.

The RSS is likely to mount pressure in favour of its long-term super-communal agenda on the BJP from outside the government through the VHP, Bajrang Dal, Rashtriya Sevika Sangh and other Sangh-controlled organizations. The VHP-Dal's stipulation of a two year deadline for the construction of a temple at Ayodhya, and the announcement of a martial arts-oriented training programme for cadres to physically expel 'foreigners' and 'infiltrators'—which will no doubt be facilitated by Advani's plan to issue identity cards to all *bonafide* citizens, and thus, polarize the religious divide—already herald the direction in which the Sangh Parivar will move.

If that is the picture at the right end of the spectrum, things are not very reassuring in the centre-left portion either. The elections' biggest loser was the United Front, which saw its Lok Sabha strength decrease from 179 to just 96. The UF's regional com-

position got further skewed: 55% of its MPs now come from just two states (West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh). The Janata Dal, at one time the Front's fulcrum, first split and now has all but collapsed. The Asom Gana Parishad scored a duck. Most important, the TDP whose leader was the Front's convenor, split away and supported the BJP in the confidence vote. It may well join hands with the BJP in some form or other.

What is less noticed, but is nevertheless important, is the shrinking of the left—the United Front's political midwife, and its ideologically most cogent component, which lends it much *gravitas* and weight. Of the Front's four left parties—the CPI(M), CPI, Revolutionary Socialist Party and Forward Block—the largest two suffered a significant loss of votes. The CPI(M)'s aggregate vote percentage decreased from 6.12 in 1996 to 5.18, and the CPI's from 1.97 to just 1.75, i.e. less than the Samata Party's 1.77, or the Trinamul Congress's 2.43. Today, the CPI(M)'s national vote is not much larger than the Bahujan Samaj Party's at 4.68%.

**T** rue, the communist parties (CPS) political weight cannot be measured by mere votes, and they are qualitatively different in character and impact from regional parties. But their decline is undeniable. With these elections, the voter has delivered a loud warning to the left: it had better shape up, or it could go into long-term decline, and become irrelevant.

The left no longer has any Lok Sabha representation from the Hindi-speaking states. This has only happened once before in 40 years. And that was in the 1977 'wave' election. The CPI(M), with 32 MPs, is now confined to West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura alone. And the CPI's strength in the Lok Sabha has been reduced to

a single-digit number, nine, in place of 12 in 1996. This is not just because the left did not make successful tactical alliances. It is because of an erosion of its social base.

For the first time since 1977, the CPI and the CPI(M) failed to win a single seat from Bihar, which used to return five to nine communist MPs. In terms of votes polled, the two CPS received their worst drubbing since 1957. From 10% in 1991, their vote is down to just four. The slack was not made up by the CPI(M)-Liberation group, Bihar's fastest growing left-wing force, which won only 2% of the vote.

**I**n West Bengal, the left retained its 33 seats, but suffered a two percentage point fall in votes. According to provisional figures, the aggregate vote for the left in West Bengal, at 47%, was only marginally higher than the Trinamul-BJP's 30% and the Congress's 16.2% added together. To put it more starkly, the *difference* in the left and opposition votes was *less than two lakhs* in the state as a whole. The left's vote has declined in 32 of 42 constituencies, in 14 of them by between 3 and 6%. The gap in urban and rural votes (the latter preferring the left) has narrowed too.

In Andhra, where there are between 70,000 and 120,000 left votes in each constituency, and where the CPS once had solid bases, the CPI won just two seats and the CPI(M) lost all three contests it fought. In Tamil Nadu too, the CPS performed poorly compared to 1996. In Kerala, a pro-Congress shift in votes reduced the left's victory margins. The left also failed to attract sizable votes in any industrial centres, where it commands some influence among the working class.

More generally, the left is less and less able to take advantage of the

opportunities offered by Indian social and economic realities, including persistent mass-scale poverty, deprivation and unemployment, growing politicization and awareness of rights among oppressed people, and rising popular disgust with corruption and administrative breakdown, to which it has often provided an alternative. Its appeal to youth, once strong thanks to the idealism, personal courage and sincerity of left leaders, has shrunk. It is not attracting new cadres from among workers and students. The left's traditional social base is narrowing, and new support – among landless agricultural workers in some areas – is not replenishing the loss.

**T**he left has been stagnating or slowly declining for the past decade. It could now soon go into a tailspin, as the CPs have done in many countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Indian CPs are among the handful of such parties – with the CPs in South Africa, Brazil, Nepal, the Philippines, and to an extent in France and Italy – which have bucked the trend. The Indian CPs experienced very little of the demoralization and despondency that their counterparts have suffered elsewhere in the world as a result of the collapse of the 'actually existing socialisms' with which they tended to be identified.

This is no doubt a remarkable achievement in a period marked by the right's worldwide ascendancy. It is largely explained by the high stature enjoyed by the Indian left's leaders, the principled nature of its politics and its relatively superior record of governance. But this capital is fast depleting. In West Bengal, the left may have become a victim of the rising aspirations it has itself generated through its successful record of governance.

The CPs can try to rescue this situation by rethinking their strategies

and making a major thrust towards mass mobilization on real issues, especially in the Hindi-speaking states, as well as cadre-recruitment and education. This could be particularly effective if it is accompanied by moves towards merger and unification of the left. But the CPs will have to try hard to keep their heads above the water – in spite of the fact that their agenda or programmes retain a large measure of relevance for the plebeian layers of the Indian population.

**A**lthough the political-ideological space for a third force, viz. a true alternative to the BJP and the Congress, has by no means vanished or shrunk to minuscule proportions in spite of the setback to the UF, it is hard to see how it will acquire organized expression unless the left's weight – and its sheer numbers – grow and it is able to exercise greater leverage on ideologically weak but politically important allies such as the SP. Successful alliance building, as in Maharashtra, where the BJP-Sena could be electorally punished, is, of course, still possible in many states. This can help stop the BJP's forward march. But for a more durable and coherent Third Front to emerge, the left would have to become more powerful and active.

Where does the Congress stand after the 1998 elections? Its fate continues to be uncertain. Nationally, the party has won just about one-half of one per cent more votes than the BJP, but its success rate (proportion of winning to contesting candidates) is far lower (32%) than the BJP's 47. Its performance is highly uneven and erratic in many states, and abysmal in Uttar Pradesh (where it has been wiped out) and poor in Bihar (where its base continues to shrink). But the Congress has been able to escape utter marginalisation and collapse. Indeed, the

entry of Sonia Gandhi, and her assumption of its presidency, has given it new hope, and certainly put a lid on more extreme forms of internal factionalism.

However, this has been achieved at an enormous cost. To start with, it is far from clear that Sonia Gandhi's election campaign won the Congress very many votes or seats. A quick analysis suggests that it made little difference in constituencies, e.g. in U.P., where the party was already in poor shape. It may have, again, only contributed marginally in Maharashtra, where the Congress was anyway better placed to improve on its 1996 performance even before her decision to campaign – thanks to alliances with the Republican Party and the SP.

**T**here are few signs that Sonia Gandhi understands the intricacies of politics, or knows her party particularly well, well enough to be its strategist. Her entry – and the crude manner in which Sitaram Kesri was thrown out of the top Congress job almost overnight – has strengthened the worst forms of sycophancy and servility in an already effete party. This will act as a dampener and an obstacle just when the Congress is in dire need of organizational decentralization and political radicalization. The party will be tempted to put on hold any serious effort to evaluate why it has been going downhill for so long, how its right-wing economic policies, its corrupt ways, and its repeated compromises with communalism have caused the loss of much of its social base, and what could be done to stem and reverse this process.

The manner in which Sonia Gandhi was 'elected' chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party when she is not a member of either House of Parliament, nor intends to

be, speaks poorly of both its lack of respect for the principle of accountability of leaders, and of substitutionism: substitute a supposedly charismatic leader for real politics and programmes, and hope it will do the trick!

**T**he Congress continues to adhere to its post-1991 neo-liberal economic policy orientation. Indeed, with Manmohan Singh emerging more powerful and becoming the party's spokesman on economic affairs, this seems to have been strengthened. Unless changed, this orientation could prolong the Congress's alienation from the bulk of the population and isolate it further from the poor in a period of economic uncertainty and slowdown.

The Congress is yet to take a convincing stand on its involvement in, and responsibility for, the steady trend over 20-years favouring the growth of communal, especially Hindu-communal, forces; the increasingly partisan role of the police and bureaucracy in riot after communal riot; and its workers' own active participation, for instance, in the anti-Sikh carnage of 1984. It has a great deal to answer for as regards the Ayodhya movement and its horrible aftermath of January 1993, especially in Bombay – when its own governments were in power in the state and at the Centre.

The Congress's 'apology' for the Babri demolition sounds less than sincere because it comes too late and is unaccompanied by a policy shift or a real tangible change at the practical level. For instance, there has been no active anti-communal mobilization by the Congress anywhere. Even the principal ideological attack on the BJP in the first post-election session of Parliament was led less by the Congress than by the left, the SP and the

BSP. Sonia Gandhi's offer of 'constructive' cooperation to Vajpayee has been seen as a signal that Congress MPs should go soft on the BJP. Gandhi has shown no inclination to refurbish the Congress's image, let alone the reality, as a party that is incorrigibly corrupt, venal and manipulative, and which is too decadent to be able to practise a people-oriented politics. The stigma of the Bofors-scandal remains a liability for the Congress, making it vulnerable to manipulation, even blackmail.

**T**hat apart, the Congress seems rather poorly placed to relate to some of the most important processes that have been reshaping Indian society and politics over the past decade and more. These include the politicization of several plebeian layers who were for long excluded from politics and effectively disenfranchised; the 'forward march of the Backwards'; the transformation of caste identities from ritual hierarchical status to political communities, especially in the Gangetic plains; the self-assertion of the Dalits; movement towards secularization and modernization among the Muslims; and at the same time, the consolidation of an upwardly mobile consumerist middle class elite that is increasingly turning rightwards and large sections of which are becoming communalised, even as the economy is realigned and restructured to favour private enterprise and global capital.

Unless the Congress can relate to the positive components of these processes and radicalize itself ideologically, it will not be able to build a programmatic basis on which to survive and grow. It is far from clear that the Congress leadership is aware of the need for such a programmatic base. In some ways, unlike Narasimha Rao, Sitaram Kesri, for all his faults and weaknesses, could at least read

the writing on the wall on the Mandal issue, as well as on communalism.

Kesri's successor remains an unknown entity. Leaders close to her, and who matter in the party, do not seem inclined to undertake the kind of frank heart-searching and critical analysis that is urgently needed to understand why the party is in a mess, and how it might get out of it. The hold over the party of power-brokers and coteries remains strong. The appointment of such staid, unimaginative, or compromised figures such as Sharad Pawar, Manmohan Singh and P.A. Sangma to a 'task force' to 'rejuvenate' the Congress does not inspire confidence that the party's leaders are serious about learning lessons from the past and charting out a bold new path. It is far from clear that they will resist the temptation to substitute tired slogans for real, imaginative, pro-people policies. But it is clear that unless they do so, the Congress's decline could well become terminal.

**T**he BJP, despite its gains, seems as yet unable to fill the vacuum the Congress has left. Nor is the bruised Third Front poised to make a serious bid to do so. Thus, the current political impasse, in which the BJP has an edge – and holds half the reins of central power – seems likely to continue for some time – unless the parties of the left and the centre transform themselves and translate the aspirations and concerns of their social base into well thought out programmes and policies. Only then can the actual centre of gravity of Indian politics – which is determined by the balance of political forces at a given point of time – be realigned with or made to coincide with its 'natural' centre, which lies on the left. Until and unless that happens, instability will remain endemic to Indian politics.

# Reaching out

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

FROM the stridency of anti-upper caste slogans like *Tilak, Tarazu, aur Talwar/Inko maaro jutha chaar* (expressing the collective wrath of the backward castes and Dalits against the Brahmins, symbolised by the 'tilak' caste mark, and the Banias and Thakurs with the weighing scales and sword emblematising their traditional occupations) to the importance of holding *bhai-chaara* (brotherhood) rallies, it has been a long, tumultuous and uneven journey across the country's politicalscape for the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). After a series of successes in the elections held after 1993 – when the BSP's partnership with the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh saw it in power for the first time – the BSP seems to have hit an all-time low in the 1998 Lok Sabha polls. Its group of Lok Sabha MPs has come down from 11 to just five.

The BSP lost all the seats it contested in Madhya Pradesh and Punjab. In U.P. it suffered a net loss of two seats, while in Haryana it managed to

gain one – thanks primarily to the alliance with the Om Prakash Chautala led Haryana Lok Dal.

But the BSP's vote share increased marginally even in states like Punjab where it contested alone. In Haryana its vote percentage was enhanced from 6.59 in 1996 to 7.68 and in Madhya Pradesh from 8.18 to 8.80. In Punjab it went up from 9.35 in 1996, when the BSP was tied up with the Akali Dal, to 12.87 despite the loss of an ally. In U.P. it increased negligibly from 20.61 to 20.76. In Jammu and Kashmir it decreased from 5.99 to 5.05. Overall its share remained more or less stagnant despite the loss of seats.

Some random inferences can be drawn from the bare-boned statistics. First, unlike in U.P., where the BSP's role has been critical in forming the coalition governments since 1993, it has not assumed that kind of leverage at the Centre, despite its leader Kanshi Ram's statements to the contrary. Kanshi Ram's refrain in the recent

elections was, 'I will be the king-maker, if not the king.' Both the roles have eluded him so far. The safest conclusion is that the BSP has been beaten to the game by more adept regional parties and formations.

Second, on its own it is unlikely to wield the degree of clout it has tried to bargain for. In U.P., for instance, the BSP's 20.76 combined with its erstwhile ally the SP's 28.67, makes for a spectacular 49.43 of the total vote percentage. It is almost 13% more than the 36.52% polled by the BJP which with its 58 seats continues to be the front-runner in the state.

**N**ot for nothing has this attractive combined vote percentage induced regretting with wistfulness among the second-rung leaders of the SP and BSP, who sounded as though they were putting up with the shenanigans of their egotistical leaders under duress. 'The SP-BSP has the potential to emerge as the country's first force,' remarked an aide of Kanshi Ram, while a SP general secretary's conclusion was, 'Had Kanshi Ram and Mulayam Singh Yadav (the SP supremo) come together, the former could have ruled over the country and the latter over U.P.' In Madhya Pradesh, its vote percentage added to the Congress' share of 39.27 produces a difference of 2.33 against the BJP's 45.75. It would have certainly taken the Congress' seat tally up by leaps and bounds.

Leaving aside prime ministerial aspirations, the electoral journey alone seems to have minimized Kanshi Ram's role in catalyzing a third front as an alternative to the BJP and Congress. The poor showing in the Lok Sabha polls has forced the BSP's leadership to lie low for the present. Unlike the SP—a comparison is inevitable since the two parties form the main opposition poles in U.P. —

which has already engaged its cadres in organizational revamping and tentative agitational programmes, the BSP is groping for a sense of direction. Why?

**T**he main reason is that the BSP has never made an impact as an opposition party — a role it was consigned to for years in the states where it has a base. Power is the key to the party's political and social impact. A clue to this phenomenon is to be sought in the presence of the Dalits in the bureaucracy, police and the provincial civil service.

There are as many Dalits (150 to be precise) in the U.P. bureaucracy as Brahmins. The Dalits have upstaged the Kayasthas who once controlled the bureaucracy. But as long as U.P. was ruled by a Brahmin chief minister, the Dalit officials were relegated to inconsequential postings. It was only when the Charan Singh headed Lok Dal government was installed did the Dalit officials assert their solidarity for the first time by grouping themselves into the Ambedkar Mahasabha, which has over the years become a forum for active lobbying for positions of power and patronage. This despite the fact that Charan Singh represented the Jats, a social grouping stereotyped for its display of 'muscle prowess' and collective 'high-handedness'.

Interestingly, mainstream intellectual opinion has sought to propagate the theory that Jats and Dalits were historical adversaries, whose antagonisms centred around land relations, while the Brahmins and Dalits have co-existed against an idyllic backdrop, approximating the Biblical utopia of the lion and the lamb. But senior Dalit officials in U.P. said that Charan Singh's coming to power was 'like a breath of fresh air' (to quote a senior police official and

an Ambedkar Mahasabha leader, S.R. Darapuri).

Perhaps the so-called antagonisms need to be put in perspective. Unlike the traditional Brahmin and Thakur or Rajput landowners, who could be classified as the old zamindars, the Jats are medium landowners who were among the principal beneficiaries of the land ceiling legislation which resulted in the abolition of zamindari. Quite apart from the feudal absentee landlords of yore, the Jats also took to tilling and cultivating the land themselves with modern methods of farming introduced with the advent of the Green Revolution. Though the otherwise enterprising and diligent new class of peasantry continued to exploit the Dalit labourers with the same impunity as the traditional landlords, the main source of antagonism was not so much this exploitation as the fact that a section of Dalits themselves began to compete with the Jats as the new landowners.

**T**hese were the Jatavs or Chamars of western U.P., who also benefited from the spin-offs of the Land Ceiling Act. The surplus earnings from their traditional calling of shoe manufacturing were invested in land. Once engaged as workers by Muslims in the leather business — concentrated in Agra and Kanpur — the Jatavs gained from the large-scale outflow of Muslims after Partition. The infrastructure left behind by Muslim traders, combined with their skills, saw the growth of an affluent class of Jatavs, who branched off into farming to keep their rural links intact.

With some wealth came the added bonus of reservations in education and jobs. In the pre-Mandal era, the first challenge to the upper caste hegemony in officialdom came from the Dalits. Land, money and power — the Dalits were the recipients of the

three ingredients of political success, albeit in varying measures. But it was enough for them to make their presence felt on the political scene, as clients or patrons, as manipulators or the subject of manipulation.

Charan Singh kindled the first instincts of where collective action could lead socially disadvantaged groups. One of U.P.'s few non-Brahmin chief ministers, Veer Bahadur Singh (Ram Naresh Yadav and C.B. Gupta were the others) fanned the urge still further. With the predominantly pro-Brahmin bureaucracy and police unreceptive to serving a non-Brahmin chief minister, Singh had no choice but to fall back on the Dalit officials, who were by then numerically quite a force.

**B**ureaucrats recall that it was Singh who took the first 'radical' (by U.P.'s social yardstick) step of posting Dalits as district magistrates and superintendents of police. These postings triggered off the first rumblings down the administrative chain. Dalits were posted as land revenue officials, clerks and *lekhpals*. In concrete terms it meant that the Land Ceiling Act would be implemented more vigorously and *pattas* given to the landless. Singh's sudden death and the return of a Brahmin chief minister, Narayan Dutt Tiwari, put a spanner in the works.

But the Veer Bahadur Singh interlude signaled a radical shift in heartland politics – it marked the end of the 'golden' era of the Brahmin-Muslim-Dalit social alliance, and unleashed ambitions of socio-political assertions in each of them, especially the Dalits. The BSP had arrived to fill the vacuum.

As noted earlier, it was on the fringes in 1989 when the heartland's politicalscape was dominated by two opposing political ideologies

symbolised by Mandal and Mandir. They first attempted to challenge the status quo and the established role of the upper castes as the norm-setters and pacesetters in society. To quote Hasan, 'OBC ideas of politics were clearly influenced by the need to politicize caste, using it as the basis for organizing political constituencies and waging political battles on behalf of the oppressed.'<sup>1</sup>

**F**or the RSS (Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh) and the BJP, founded on the ideal of a 'strong, resurgent' India emblemized in the symbol of an expansionist map of *Akhand Bharat* – whose boundaries go beyond Afghanistan in the North West to Indonesia in the East – the very idea of a fractured post-Mandal social polity was anathema. L.K. Advani's *Ram rath* rolled across the plains of the West and the heartland selling the 'vision' of an *Akhand Bharat* contained in the depiction of a macho Ram.

Where was the BSP, with its pachyderm symbol in sky blue, in a landscape dominated by Mulayam Singh Yadav and his OBC politics and the BJP and its communal politics? As a fringe party with 11 MLAs in the U.P. legislature in 1991. But the first glimmerings of Kanshi Ram's unique school of politics were seen when he forged a tentative alliance with Mulayam Singh Yadav in the Lok Sabha by-election of November 1991 in Etawah.

Kanshi Ram thus far had given the impression of being a non-serious player in electoral politics. The BSP peddled the lack of an election manifesto as a virtue. Kanshi Ram's oft repeated line was: 'We have a one point programme – take power.' He had always contested in high-profile

fight – whether it was against V.P. Singh and Sunil Shastri in the Allahabad by-election of June 1988 or in Amethi in 1991. But he established the fact that the Dalits were moving away from the Congress.

The decision to contest the Etawah by-poll represented the first serious move on his part to enlarge his Dalit base and embrace other important social groupings, which in this case happened to be Mulayam Singh Yadav's base of Yadavs and Muslims. The Congress put up a Brahmin, Shiv Shanker Tiwari from Etawah with its huge population of Brahmins. The BJP settled for a backward caste candidate from among the Shakhys. Kanshi Ram won despite an imperfect alliance. It proved that a good section of the Yadavs and Muslims had voted for him along with the Dalits. Tiwari's defeat signaled the end of the Congress' winning social equation.

**I**solated as it was, the Etawah by-poll – which did not merit the attention of political analysts – heralded the arrival of a fractured social polity in U.P. This was within just five months of a 'saffron' sweep in the state. The Congress apart, the BJP had reason to feel shaky. Its worst fears came true when the SP-BSP alliance edged out the BJP in the 1993 assembly elections which took place exactly a year after what the Hindutva combine would describe as a 'watershed' in its political growth – the demolition of the Babri mosque on 6 December 1992. Instead of 'unifying' Hindu society, a year-and-a-half of saffron rule had caused the fissures to become more pronounced.

The SP-BSP partnership, which sought to coalesce the interests of the other backward classes (OBCs), Dalits, Muslims and other religious minorities, was hailed by secularists and liberals as holding out the first

1. Zoya Hasan, *Quest for Power: Oppositional Movements and Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh*, Oxford University Press, 1998.



real challenge to upper caste hegemony. Stray voices of sceptics, however, cautioned that the arrangement was born more out of the short-term expediency of finding a place for these sections under the political sun than posing an ideological challenge to the status quoist Brahminical order.

Kanshi Ram attempted to sugar-coat the experiment in a 'politically correct' idiom as a fight against the forces of the *Manuvadi* structure. Cracks developed in a matter of time. The Samajwadi Party-led new social coalition sent out a clear signal from day one that it was in government to empower and protect the interests of the OBCs, especially the more affluent groupings of Yadavs and Kurmis. Appropriately enough, the then chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and his deputy, Beni Prasad Verma, a Kurmi, held a joint public meeting a day after the government was installed to beam this message in the OBC stronghold of Barabanki.

**A**t the same meeting, Yadav announced policies and measures to strengthen the interests of the more backward classes (MBCs) like Kumhars and Mallahs. For the Kumhars, whose traditional occupation is pottery manufacture, and the Mallahs, who are fishermen, he announced direct leasehold rights over clayey soil and lakes and ponds which were traditionally leased out to intermediaries by the previous governments and thereby trapped these communities in an intricate web of exploitation.

The political message had an immediate repercussion at the grassroots. The OBCs, who lay low during the preceding BJP regime, began flexing their muscles not so much at the upper castes but the Dalits, who were also exhilarated by the prospect of participation in government for the first

time ever. Clashes broke out in places where the Dalits tried to take over possession of land which was given to them by the Congress governments. Their *modus operandi* was to put up Ambedkar statues. The land was almost always in the possession of the OBCs since in its overweening interest to safeguard the interests of the upper castes, the Congress governments had parceled out land in the possession of either the intermediate castes like the Jats or the OBCs to be redistributed among the Dalits. Land, the Congress had seen to it, would preempt the OBC-Dalit alliance from crystallizing.

Mulayam Singh Yadav also used the elections to the *panchayats* and cooperatives to the advantage of the OBCs. The shift in power from the upper castes to the OBCs at the grassroots made the Congress and the BJP shaky. But ill equipped to act on their own, they turned to Kanshi Ram who by then had become distrustful of Yadav's bonafides.

Using the BSP's slogan of *Vote hamara, raj tumhara, nahi chalega, nahi chalega* (We will no longer allow the upper castes to seize power with the Dalits' votes) to its advantage, the BJP offered to install Kanshi Ram's protegee Mayawati as chief minister if he agreed to sunder his ties with the SP. The BSP fell to the bait and thus an anti-BJP rainbow coalition vanished.

**W**hat the BJP had not bargained for from the Kanshi Ram-Mayawati duo was their acumen and skills to exploit the power structure to their advantage. If Yadav played around with the panchayats and cooperatives to empower his constituents, for the BSP's leaders the bureaucracy was putty in their able hands, to be manipulated at will. Dalit bureaucrats and police officials were given the choicest postings. The legislation on the

Prevention of Atrocities against the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (popularly known as the Harijan Act) was enforced in letter and spirit for the first time. Not only Yadav's OBCs, even the BJP's upper caste supporters bore the brunt of this Act to such an extent that the normally voluble Brahmins and Thakurs, especially those living in villages and small towns, clamped up for the first time for fear that their usual utterances (which were of course pejorative) would provoke the provisions of the 'dreaded' Act. Quite simply, Mayawati put the fear of god into the hearts of the non-Dalits.

**N**aturally the BJP could not endlessly vindicate Mayawati's acts to its own constituents. Using the bogey of 'corruption' and 'misrule' it withdrew support to the government. But there was a section in the BJP, then as now, notably the Brahmin leaders like Atal Behari Vajpayee, Murli Manohar Joshi and Kalraj Mishra who reckoned that only through an alliance with the BSP could the BJP hope to rule on its own strength at the Centre. The calculation was obviously inspired by the Congress' Brahmin-Dalit-Muslim formula (minus the Muslims) which enabled the party to hold its own in the heartland for decades.

But the OBC leaders like Kalyan Singh and Thakurs like Rajnath Singh opposed the idea as they feared it would edge them out in the BJP's scheme of politics. Such apprehensions persisted the second time round when Vajpayee and Joshi—blessed by the RSS—firmed up an alliance with the BSP to form a government and head it by rotation, six months by a BSP chief minister and six months by one from the BJP.

If there was a heady exuberance among the Dalits during Mayawati's first tenure as the chief minister, which

gave the impression they hadn't quite come to terms with the reality of being in power, the second term saw them settling down to the nitty-gritty of governance and going about their agenda in a more hard-headed manner. Mayawati used the Harijan Act as fiercely as before and added more concrete programmes. She restructured the entire chain of command in the administration to ensure that landless Dalits, who were given *pattas* way back during the Emergency by Indira Gandhi, were actually given possession of their land – irrespective of whether it clashed with the interests of the BJP's upper caste voters or not.

**T**he Ambedkar village scheme was seriously implemented for the first time. A cluster of villages in each district was earmarked under the scheme and provided with *pucca* roads, tube-wells, canals, a primary health centre, a primary school (actually manned by teachers), and a community centre. Apart from providing the basic infrastructure to improve the quality of life for the rural Dalits, such schemes imparted a sense of dignity and a more forward looking vision to them for the first time.

In an Ambedkar village in the Tundla region, the Dalits – traditional land-owners, well-fed and scarcely fitting into the insular stereotype of impoverished people – I was told that the infrastructure facilities enabled them to challenge the upper castes' patronage for the first time ever. 'Now we do not have to go begging to them for water to irrigate our fields. The other day when I was invited by a Brahmin for a family wedding, I told him clearly, you go about it properly. We will attend the wedding only if you personally call on us and do not make separate sitting arrangements for us. He had no choice but to agree,' said a BSP activist.

In another village in Aligarh district, the arrogant Thakurs were hoist on their own petard when one day they refused to allow the Dalits the use of the only road connecting the village with the city. This had been an age-old practice, but the new generation of conscientised Dalits refused to follow it. They caught hold of some Thakurs, and in what was considered the 'ultimate insult', shaved off their moustaches.

To proponents of the line that caste-based assertions are antithetical to development activities, to those who hold 'casteist politics' responsible for a state's 'backwardness', Mayawati's answer was the opposite. In essence it meant development would also have to include among its beneficiaries the socially and economically disadvantaged groupings.

**T**he long-term implication are that given the obduracy of the heartland's upper castes to share power with other groups – interestingly, unlike the southern Brahmins they did not flee their regions when confronted with the inevitability of OBC-Dalit empowerment and have opted to fight it out – the BSP cannot persist with its agenda unless it strikes an alliance. But to translate its political base and voting power into political power, the BSP must strike durable alliances based on certain political principles and a commitment to a shared vision, rather than one which would yield short-term benefits. Otherwise, the party will be left high and dry, as in U.P., where a series of splits have all but left the BSP's shell intact – for the moment at least.

As of now, its only strategy – and a tentative one at that – aims to go beyond its limited Jatav base to reach out to other caste groupings, particularly the MBCs. Hence the emphasis on *bhai-chaara* in its latest rhetoric.

# From resistance to resignation

M ASLAM

THIS paper attempts to understand how sections of Muslims belonging to various socio-economic strata and different ideological and sectarian persuasions responded to the ideology of *Hindutva*, particularly in the context of elections held in U.P. since 1993. It is largely based on interviews conducted in Allahabad around the 1993 and 1996 U.P. Assembly elections, the recently held parliamentary elections (1998), and a survey of about 200 Muslim respondents each in

Allahabad and Banaras in January/February 1997.

The growth of *Hindutva* in the last decade has been a disturbing and complex phenomenon. It both created an environment for the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 by Hindu militants and prepared the ground for the emergence of social and political forces like the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which offered the Muslims political choices other than the Congress to fight the Hindu right in U.P.

The attempts of the advocates of *Hindutva* to simultaneously target

\* This paper is extracted from a larger report prepared for the Thematic Studies project of The National Election Study 1996, sponsored by the CSDS and UGC.

Muslims and to woo them has compelled different sections of Muslims to constantly review their perception and response to this seemingly changing ideology, particularly when planning electoral strategy. Here I shall mainly focus on the response of the U.P. Muslims.

I had closely observed the 1993 U.P. Assembly election, particularly in Allahabad, and used the opportunity to interview a sizeable number of Muslims. In comparison to 1993, the atmosphere during the 1996 parliamentary as well as assembly elections was visibly cynical and lacking in enthusiasm as far as Muslims were concerned. By the time the 1998 parliamentary election was held, this cynicism became even more pronounced.

**D**uring the 1993 U.P. Assembly election the Muslims mood was surcharged. Their enthusiasm was overtly visible as was their apprehension. Coming within six months of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the 1993 election was an important one. Muslims were understandably nervous about how the majority community would vote. They feared that a BJP victory would give formal legitimacy to the demolition of the Babri Masjid and were desperate to ensure that the BJP was contained. In this endeavour they were willing to join forces with any political formation, other than the Congress, which could defeat the BJP. Fortunately for the Muslims such a formation crystallized in the form of the SP-BSP alliance. Their support to this alliance succeeded in containing the BJP.

By the time the 1996 election was held, the SP-BSP alliance had fallen apart. For a short period the BSP did form a government with the support of the BJP and worse, the SP and BSP entered the 1996 elections as sworn enemies. A weak Congress,

which the Muslims were in no mood to forgive for its role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and an unbridgeable divide in the political formation which the Muslims had enthusiastically supported barely three years back, left them on the horns of a dilemma. Although the U.P. Muslims did eventually cast their lot with Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party, it was not with the enthusiasm which was visible earlier. In 1993 they had voted the SP-BSP alliance with enthusiasm and hope; in 1996 the Muslims voted for the SP mainly because there appeared to be no other choice.

By 1998 this waning enthusiasm had turned into utter cynicism. The Congress and other anti-BJP political formations claimed Muslim votes on the slogan of secularism and social justice, which increasingly sounded hollow and unconvincing; the mistrust and petty quarrels among them had created a sense of revulsion in the minds of voters in general and Muslim voters in particular.

**T**he inability of these forces to forge an alliance even after the 1996 election resulted in months of political uncertainty. The subsequent experiment by the BJP and BSP to share power by rotating chief ministers every six months, predictably broke down soon after Mayawati's first term in office. This resulted in blatant horse-trading and opportunistic splits within the U.P. Congress and the BSP. Every defector was promptly inducted into the Kalyan Singh ministry, the strength of which almost reached a hundred. Subsequently, shameful scenes were enacted by the U.P. legislators of all political denominations in the Assembly during the vote of confidence, making a complete mockery of the political system. It exposed in the crudest form the depths to which all political parties and their leaders

could descend in their lust for power. All talk of principles and ideology seemed to have lost meaning.

Coming in the wake of these developments, the 1998 election offered limited choices to the U.P. Muslims. The general feeling of cynicism and disenchantment with politics was widespread. Today, more Muslims can be heard saying that 'all political parties are the same', that 'they all use Muslims as vote banks', and that 'no political party has ever done anything concrete/substantial for the Muslims.' It is another matter that 'concrete/substantial' are never coherently defined. Ironically, this is close to what the BJP, the main political exponent of Hindutva, has claimed for quite some time.

**A**nother perceptible change apparent during the last election was a metamorphosis in the Muslim mood towards the BJP. Though during election, one normally sees resistance among Muslims to the BJP, this time around the mood was one of resignation. There were at least two reasons for this. First, the Muslims appeared to be disturbed by the petty quarrels and back stabbing in the anti-BJP camp. Second, and more significant, a major thrust of the BJP's campaign during the last election, particularly by its national leadership, was to seriously woo the Muslims and allay their fears. This worked wonders from the BJP point of view. It more than doubled its share of the Muslim vote in U.P. (from between 2-3% to about 6-7%). It was able to neutralize Muslim resistance to a considerable degree, which helped it win many more seats than it would otherwise have.

During the 1993 election I had witnessed the enthusiasm with which *burqa* clad women stood in queues at polling booths and how young Muslim boys carted their old grandparents

on bicycles, rickshaws and even in their arms, in order to enable them to cast their vote. In contrast, during the last election I found some of the same polling booths in the Muslim *mohallas* comparatively deserted. With the opposition against the BJP hopelessly divided, Muslims seemed to have realized that their effort alone could not do much to keep the BJP out, and they did not look too concerned about it. This metamorphosis in the Muslim attitude towards the BJP has in fact been crystallizing for some time; there was an indication of it even in the survey we conducted after the October 1996 U.P. Assembly election.

**A** brief analysis of some of the findings of the survey which was conducted in Allahabad and Banaras in January/February 1997 would perhaps be useful at this stage. I would like to imagine that the results of a similar survey would not be significantly different if it were conducted today, except perhaps that Muslims have become a little softer towards the Congress. For the purpose of the survey we identified a representative Muslim *mohalla* of about 200 households in each of the two cities, and interviewed one member from each household beginning from one end and stopped when we reached the figure of two hundred.

The *mohalla* selected in Allahabad was Bakshi Bazar situated between Atala and Nakhas Kona in the heart of the Muslim settlement in the old city. The Assembly constituency is Allahabad West (no. 282). This constituency though largely urban has a rural segment as well. We had initially planned to study both segments, but due to problems with investigators, could manage the urban segment only. The trades and economic activities in which Muslims in the urban segment are most visible are the

manufacture of tin *almirahs*, boxes, safes and related items; the wood furniture business; *beedi* making, and the meat and hide trade. The percentage of Muslims is also significant among tailors, barbers and motor mechanics. The *mohalla* selected for the survey came closest to adequately representing the Muslim sectarian, social and economic diversity in Allahabad.

**I**n Banaras the *mohalla* selected was Baqrabad in Jaitpura. The Assembly constituency is Varanasi North (no. 243). This is an entirely urban constituency with a large section of Muslim weavers belonging to the Ansari *biradari*. Though apparently indistinguishable to an outsider, the Ansaris here are not as homogenous as they appear to be. Besides reflecting the socio-economic and sectarian differences that are common among Muslims in U.P., the Ansaris in Banaras are divided into two major groups or sub-biradaris: 'Banarasiya' who claim to be the original inhabitants of Banaras and 'Mauwale' or those who have migrated from nearby Mau over the last 200 years or so. The two sub-biradaris are strictly endogamous and the identification of members with their respective groups is fairly strong. This has major social and political implications, especially during elections. The *mohalla* chosen has a near equal representation of both the major sub-biradaris.

While conducting the survey we asked some questions about the social and economic profile of the respondents. Others were designed to elicit their response to the phenomenon of Hindutva and their conduct in the recently concluded Assembly election held in October 1996. Here I shall briefly focus and analyze only those questions which give an indication of the changing Muslim response to Hindutva and elections.

To begin with, respondents were asked to identify what in their opinion was the most important issue during the October 1996 election. Three options were given: (a) to check/defeat the growth of communal forces, (b) to strengthen the unity of the minorities, backward classes and Dalits and (c) to remove impediments in the way of trade and occupation. As anticipated, a very large majority of respondents – 75% in Allahabad and 63% in Banaras – indicated that defeating communal forces was uppermost in their minds. However, while the remaining 25% in Allahabad were almost equally divided between the second and the third options, it was heartening to see that the remaining 37% of the respondents in Banaras clearly indicated that removing bottlenecks in the way of trade and occupation should be at the top of the agenda. This indicates that where Muslims are gainfully engaged in some reasonably successful trade or occupation, as weaving in the case of Muslims in Banaras, they tend to be less obsessed with communalism as an issue, unless of course the situation around them is communally explosive.

**A**nother question asked was whether the BJP was laying emphasis on the slogan of Hindutva merely to win elections or whether there was a deeper design/long term goal which they had in mind. Surprisingly, 56% felt that the BJP was using the slogan of Hindutva mainly for electoral gain and only 25% suspected any deeper design or that the BJP had any long-term agenda which by implication would harm the interests of Muslims. About 20% were undecided. This implies that there is much less schizophrenia in the Muslim mind about the BJP and much less fear about BJP being in government than is commonly imagined.

On being asked whether Muslim communalism has contributed or helped to accelerate the growth of Hindu communalism, 11% said yes, 41% said to some extent, while 48% disagreed with the proposition. This would indicate that over 50% of the Muslims have come around to thinking that the growth of communalism among Muslims has directly or indirectly helped the growth of Hindu communalism. Such views among educated/enlightened Muslims would not be considered surprising. But considering that the survey was conducted in 'typical' Muslim mohallas of the old city areas of towns where Muslims are economically and educationally backward, this is indeed a positive development. It indicates that there is an increasing realization among Muslims of the need to arrest the rise of Muslim communalism to check the growth of Hindu communalism.

**T**o the question—what would happen if the BJP came to power at the Centre—14% indicated that Muslims would be discriminated against, 35% anticipated that the religious rights and freedoms given to the minorities would be withdrawn, 17% feared that communal riots would increase, and 34% said that it would make no difference. Considering the anti-Muslim pronouncements of many of the advocates of Hindutva, it is not surprising for Muslims to fear that their religious freedoms would be curtailed or that they would be discriminated against if the BJP came to power. What is surprising is that 34% actually felt that a BJP government would be no different from any other government. I would imagine that this figure would not be much higher if the survey was conducted in a non-Muslim mohalla.

Considering the nature of mohallas where the survey was conducted, 34% is a very high figure. It

could mean one or more of the following: that a sufficiently large number of U.P. Muslims are so disgusted or disillusioned with the non-BJP parties that they feel that the BJP cannot be much worse; that they are not afraid of the BJP coming to power, in which case they have sufficient faith that the secular fabric in India is strong and cannot be subverted; that the BJP's bark is worse than its bite and that once in power it will mellow down and behave like any other political party. Whichever way we look at it, apparently the Muslim attitude to the BJP is gradually moving closer to the attitude of their non-Muslim counterparts.

Having ascertained in an earlier question that the Muslims in their mohallas by and large did not vote for the Congress in the 1996 election, we tried to seek an explanation. Not surprisingly 66% indicated that it was because the Congress had failed to save the Babri Masjid from demolition. However, as many as 32% did not vote for the Congress because it had failed to do anything for their social and economic uplift even after being in power for decades. This reinforces the view that a sizable section of the Muslims is less emotional about communal issues and the Babri Masjid, and more concerned about the social and economic problems confronting them.

**T**his is further borne out by the Muslim response to a question regarding the political strategy they should adopt in order to cope with the growing forces of Hindutva. Of the given options 54% favoured an alliance with the backward classes and Dalits, 24% felt that Muslims should retain their distinct identity, while 22% said that Muslims should form their own political party. A vast majority of them felt that they could not fight Hindu communalism by forming their own party;

they realized that would be counter-productive. It is not surprising that a majority of Muslims in U.P. have come around to the view that the best course for them is to forge a broad alliance with the backward classes and the Dalits. It is another matter that the leaders of the backwards and the Dalits do not appear to have realized this.

**A**s to which political formation has most steadfastly opposed Hindu communalism and is likely to do so in the foreseeable future, Congress got 5%, Janata-Dal 6%, SP 67%, Communists 19%, and the BSP a paltry 2%. That Mulayam Singh's SP is seen by the U.P. Muslims as the main bulwark against Hindutva is not surprising considering that he has been its most vocal opponent. As chief minister in 1990 he did not hesitate to use force to prevent the demolition of the Babri Masjid when it was first attacked. The death of about a dozen Hindu militants, magnified by the Sangh Parivar into hundreds and even thousands, greatly damaged Mulayam's image; he came to be sarcastically referred to as Maulana Mulayam. As a consequence he lost out to BJP's Kalyan Singh in the 1991 election.

Mulayam was, however, able to claim that he had sacrificed his office at the altar of secularism, which by implication meant the protection of Muslim interests. Ever since, Mulayam has been the chief claimant and beneficiary of Muslim votes in U.P., cornering between 70% to 65% in the '93, '96 and '98 elections. However, of late, a view has emerged among a section of Muslims that he has a stake in the preservation of communalism to play the crusader and bag the Muslim vote. Fortunately for Mulayam, this view has few adherents and even they are prudent enough not to be too vocal at this stage as the political

alternatives before the U.P. Muslims are limited.

Why the BSP figures so low in the Muslim mind needs some explanation. The Dalit-Muslim alliance is an old Republican Party dream and part of its agenda since the 1960s. Its political arithmetic in U.P. looks irresistible – about 22% Dalits and close to 17% Muslims add up to a winning electoral combination. Both have real and imagined grievances against the system and claim to be socially and economically underprivileged and discriminated against. Periodically both Kanshi Ram and Mayawati have made concerted efforts to woo the Muslims and have even flaunted data to show that the BSP has given more representation to Muslims in allotting tickets to the legislatures and ministerial positions when in government than Mulayam. There is some truth to these assertions. In 1993-94, a section of the Muslim intelligentsia had argued for a closer alliance with the BSP.

**H**owever, Mayawati's arrogant style of functioning and her thoughtless statements have often hurt the sentiments of various social and religious groups, including Muslims. The manner in which she dismissed and humiliated one of her ministers, Rashid Masood, having his baggage thrown out of his official residence within 24 hours of his dismissal, was perhaps part of her style. Since the minister happened to be a Muslim, its symbolic ramifications were considerable. It also gave Mulayam an opportunity which he fully capitalized upon, welcoming Masood with open arms.

The way Mayawati deserted the SP and formed a government with BJP support was projected by Mulayam as treachery and betrayal of the secular mandate. All this alienated the Muslims from the BSP. However, Mayawati's anti-BJP rhetoric, and her

bold and uncompromising attitude on Kashi and Mathura even when she was dependent on BJP support, has not failed to impress a section of Muslims. Nevertheless, even today, the BSP is only acceptable to the Muslims in combination with SP. They have pleaded with the leadership of the two parties to bury the hatchet and forge an electoral alliance.

**F**inally, I would like to analyze the Muslim response to one last question. On being asked why Muslims failed to contain the BJP in U.P. in the 1996 election, 41% attributed it to a division in the Muslim votes in their constituencies, 31% stated that there was no consensus on whom to vote for, 22% felt that Muslims did not vote in large numbers, and only 6% – a very tiny percentage of Muslims – attributed BJP's victory to a consolidation of Hindu votes. The fact that such a large percentage of Muslims admit to a division of their votes, or a lack of consensus on whom to vote for, should be an eye-opener to those who expound theories about block voting among Muslims or about consolidation of Muslim votes. That a reasonably large number felt that the Muslim turnout was low, reinforces the general feeling of apathy, cynicism and disenchantment with politics among Muslims mentioned earlier.

Before concluding it would be useful to reiterate that the Muslims like the Hindus are highly heterogeneous, deeply fragmented by sectarian, caste, class, regional and linguistic cleavages, and that the bond of religion is tenuous. Like all religious bonds, it acquires salience when threatened. A consolidation of Muslim votes is purely contextual – it generally takes place either when the communal environment is surcharged, or when there is a credible, viable and winnable secular alternative.

'What can Muslims expect from a BJP government at the Centre,' I asked a teacher of Arabic. He, along with his family, runs several *madrasas* (Muslim religious school) in different parts of the country. Having experienced various BJP governments, including in U.P., he saw no basic change. In fact, he pointed to certain benefits for Muslims.

He pointed out that since the BJP and Sangh Parivar are the main instigators of communal riots, they are more easily able to prevent them when in power. He also claimed that it was easier to get permission to build mosques and madrasas under a BJP government. He explained that in U.P. and Maharashtra, especially Mumbai, dozens of projects to build mosques and madrasas had been pending for nearly two decades. The Congress and other secular governments were afraid to grant permission for fear of being branded as communal. These, he claimed, were cleared by the BJP-Shiv Sena government in less than two years.

**H**owever, in the recently held election, the Muslims overwhelmingly voted against the BJP-Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra. How do we explain this? There had been no communal riots since the incumbent government took power, and the political environment during the election was far from being communally charged. So why did they vote against the government? Perhaps because they still mistrust the overtly Hindutva driven governments, despite the symbolic concessions offered. In this election they had a viable, credible and winning secular alternative and they voted for it with zest. In U.P., on the other hand, where there was no such alternative, their voting pattern continued to be marked by confusion, cynicism and apathy.

# Ever the outsider

PAMELA PHILIPPOSE

THERE were some notable absentees at last month's party celebrating the lifting of prohibition in Haryana. As the liquor industry punched at its calculators to tot up potential profits, and the tourist lobby settled down in right earnest to plying guests with large pegs of whisky with soda, women in a Rohtak village, speaking to a newspaper reporter, expressed fear that drunken brawls and wife-beating would once again be part of their lives.

Prohibition may not have been a conspicuous success in Haryana. But its withdrawal after the electoral reverses of Chief Minister Bansi Lal's Haryana Vikas Party in the recent Lok Sabha elections, signifies the defeat of what is undoubtedly a woman's issue. Indeed, it had for a brief period of time, beginning with the anti-arack agitations of the early '90s that erupted in nondescript villages of Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district, captured both the popular imagination and political attention. But the backlash was not long in coming. Within a span of five years in fact. With Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu

Naidu going back in April 1997 on his father-in-law's move to ban liquor sales in the state, and Bansi Lal following suit exactly a year later, that brief spring of resistance came to an end.

These developments highlight the nature of political discourse during the recent Lok Sabha election — it was largely barren of issues that touch people's lives. They also show how the decision-making processes in the country serve constantly to mute the voices and concerns of women. But the fact that prohibition, its imposition or its withdrawal, had enormous political ramifications in this country also shows that the distinction that is sometimes made between social and political issues is a false one. Almost as false, in fact, as the carefully constructed dichotomy between the private and public spheres.

For centuries, the women's universe was perceived as the 'private sphere', with the men, the true wielders of power, dominating the 'public sphere'. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which provides the ideological moorings of the BJP,



gives cultural and political legitimacy to such a construct when it states that 'the main function of a woman is to impart noble samskaras to the young generation—her prime responsibility is caring for the family...in our tradition women look after the house and men outside.'

But a democratic polity demands the collapsing of such arbitrary compartmentalization. The most important argument in support of bringing more women in the political mainstream hinges on the fact that women's viewpoints and experiences are crucial in a democracy. Something is supposed to change in the political culture of the country when hitherto invisible but significant social groups, like women, assume a critical mass in decision-making. It is not a charitable exercise, as some of the arguments over the Bill seeking to reserve 33 and one-third per cent of seats to women in state legislatures and Parliament seem to make out, but an engendering one.

**T**his distinction is important to keep in mind, especially as the Constitution (81st Amendment) Bill of 1986 guaranteeing 33.3% reservations for women in Parliament and state legislatures is perceived in some quarters as going against the interests of democracy. One only has to take the results of the 1998 general election to show how democracy, as it is practised in this country, militates against women's participation. Despite party manifestos stating that the Reservations Bill was worthy of implementation, no attempt was made by any political party to pay even token obeisance to the idea behind such a measure by fielding more women candidates. Finally, of the 268 women candidates in the fray, 43 won. They constitute 7.9% of the total parliamentary seats.

If 50 years of Indian democracy have not seen women's representation in Parliament and state legislatures cross even a pathetic 10% mark, radical measures are required to ensure that women constitute a critical mass in mainstream politics. Reservations is one such measure, and should remain in place until women are fielded and elected in their own right.

**T**oday, the Bill is once again on the anvil, with the ruling BJP-led coalition having promised in its National Agenda to push it through. But its stormy trajectory in the 11th Lok Sabha does not portend well for its fate in the 12th. History tends to repeat itself on this issue. Remember, there was a consensus on the Bill even in the 1996 general election. When the UF government came to power in June that year, it too had showcased its commitment to the Bill in the Common Minimum Programme. But from the moment it was presented in the September of that year by the then Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, every attempt, from old-fashioned filibustering to explicit opposition, was made to stall its passage. In July, it was referred to a Joint Select Committee. Even after the Select Committee recommended its passage, it got tossed about like a volleyball, from one session to the next, until the United Front government collapsed in December 1997.

Two of the chief derailleurs of the Bill were from within the party that is now in power. BJP's Uma Bharati, a minister of state in the present cabinet, had introduced the first spoke in the wheel by objecting to the Bill's 'upper caste' nature. She demanded that reservations for OBCs be made within women's reservations. In December 1996, although the Joint Select Committee did not rule out provisions for OBC reservations at an appropriate

time but insisted that the Bill must be allowed to go through, BJP MP Gangacharan Rajput chose to organize a signature campaign once again attacking it over the OBC issue.

To add yet another dimension to the conundrum, the AIADMK, a senior member in the ruling coalition at the Centre, has recently stated that it will fight for OBC representation in the Bill. Such posturing could well encourage groups which had earlier objected to the Bill to once again stall its passage. But there are limits to what a Bill of this kind, even if it does become law, can achieve. Political power in itself is limited and limiting if it does not, in turn, allow ordinary women in this country to exercise the human rights granted to them by the Constitution.

**I**t follows, of course, that women's ability to exercise these rights will provide them with the opportunities and skills to participate in decision-making. Among these rights are the fundamental ones of a right to an education, the right to life and adequate nutrition, the right to work and, yes, the right—embodied in Article 21—to live with dignity.

Prime Minister Vajpayee has gone on record that he is committed to providing every girl in this country free education up to the college level. Here again it is useful to remember that many prime ministers have voiced similar intentions in the past—I.K. Gujral's Balika Samridhi Yojna announced last August was just one of them. Yet the 25% differential between male and female literacy has persisted in this country since 1961, with about 61% women aged seven and above found illiterate in the 1991 Census.

The reasons for this are well-known and Mahbub ul Haq and Khadija Haq have dwelt at some length upon them in their Human

Development in South Asia 1998 report. The point is that even when education is free, there are many costs to attending a school, including opportunity costs, since the girls could otherwise be doing household chores or earning a small income for the family. The HDSA quotes a World Bank study to show that as income falls, parents' willingness to educate their daughters decreases faster than their willingness to educate their sons.

**I**n other words, education for the girl child—albeit free education—has necessarily to be linked with policies that address the general well-being of the entire community. The approach paper to the Ninth Plan recognizes this. The two important tasks it sets for the country is the eradication of income poverty by the year 2005; and provision of basic services in health, education, safe drinking water, sanitation, shelter and food security for all. The babus, as Marx may have put it, have interpreted the world. The point, however, is to change it.

Defining food security is itself a complex task. Malnutrition has put its manacle on 53% of Indian children under four years of age and the redness of their hair, like the litmus test in a school lab, bears evidence of it. But even in conditions where the whole family lives in deprived circumstances, it is the girl child who is more likely to be underfed than her brother. The 1992 all-India figures of the National Sample Registration System show that infant mortality rates among boys is lower than that of girls, who are likely to be breast-fed for a shorter period, and more likely to be denied attention in a medical emergency.

This deprivation doesn't stop with her. It puts its footprint on future generations. The Indian Council of Medical Research has recommended an intake of 2,500 calories for expect-

ant mothers. Yet, on an average, a pregnant Indian mother gets 1,400 to 1,600 calories. An estimated 60 to 68% of pregnant Indians suffer from anaemia caused by lack of iron—a mineral that is vital for neuronal development responsible for the growth of the human brain.

State initiatives to address this founder on the rocks of corruption and ineptitude. The NCAER (National Council of Applied Economic Research) in its human development profile of rural India, based on 1994 data collected from 33,000 households, indicates that the poorest regions are precisely the ones that are deprived of a functioning Public Distribution System. Only 5% of households in a state like Bihar, for instance, have access to fair price shops.

**E**ven the utilization of the funds earmarked for improving nutrition at a mass level has been extremely unsatisfactory. According to one estimate, during '92-93, the average utilization rate of money earmarked for the social sector for all states was a little over 44% of the Eighth Plan outlay. Most states have tripped over schemes like mid-day meals, which were very useful in helping to retain children in schools, even while improving their nutritional profiles. Of the Rs 14,000 million allocated by the Centre for the scheme in the 1996-97 budget, only Rs 8,000 million was utilized.

There's many a slip between macro-level planning and micro-level implementation, just as policy changes made at the highest levels of government sometimes spell disaster at the ground level. Last September a group of economists, sociologists, and social activists met in Delhi to take stock of the effects that economic liberalization has had on the lives of working women. Feminist scholar and activist, Amrita Chhachhi,

summed it up thus: 'This is a period characterised by unevenness and uncertainty. We are witnessing processes of change and reversal. Those who once had access to jobs and health care, are now losing this access.'

**W**hether it was in the *beedi* rolling units of Mangalore or the construction industry of Chennai, the diamond processing industries of Mumbai or the electronics factories of Delhi, liberalization has deepened three processes: invisibility and insecurity of work, fear of unionization and job loss. The insecurity manifests itself in several ways. Contracts and sub-contracts mean that there is no formal employer-employee relationship, therefore no welfare provisions are ever made, and many get less than the minimum wage.

To add to this, jobs themselves are difficult to get. In the electronic units of Delhi, Chhachhi discovered that the demand for women is in the semi-skilled, low-wage end. But fear of losing even these dreary jobs prevents workers from joining a union or demanding their rights. It also prevents them from protesting when employers exploit them sexually.

In a far-reaching judgement delivered last August to a writ petition filed against the brutal gang rape of Bhanwari, a social worker in a Rajasthan village, the Supreme Court made many useful recommendations. Among them, it was made expedient on the employer to 'prevent or deter the commission of acts of sexual harassment and to provide the procedures for the resolution, settlement or prosecution of acts of sexual harassment.' What was interesting in the *Vishaka vs State of Rajasthan* case, was that the judges recognised that 'equality of employment can be seriously impaired when women are subjected to gender specific violence,

such as sexual harassment in the work place....'

The judgement only sought to make up for what the judges clearly recognised as a lacuna in the law. To date, there is no legal provision in the country to deal specifically with the sexual harassment of working women in the workplace, just as India has no law that addresses a crime as horrendous as child abuse. Legally, child sexual abuse is defined only as the sexual penetration of a child who is below 16 years of age.

It would require a rare political courage to address these issues. Each is linked intimately with the other, just as they are with a broader social reality. To give an example, an issue like inheritance rights for women is related to the social value of female children within communities, but it is also linked to general land reform. Twenty four years ago, the Committee on the Status of Women in India recognised this when it said: 'While it is true that the status of women constitutes a problem in almost all societies, and has emerged today as a fundamental crisis in human development, we found that sex inequality cannot in reality be differentiated from the variety of social, economic and cultural inequalities in Indian society. The inequalities inherent in our traditional social structure, based on caste, community and class have a very significant influence on the status of women in different spheres.'

Only one thing has changed in the years since these words were written. Today, the language of social justice is used not just by well-meaning development *wallahs*, but by politicians of all persuasions. Yet, even as they swear by women's empowerment, in actual terms they often end up unleashing processes of disempowerment through hidden and not-so-hidden cultural and economic agendas.

## Media tilts

P. SAINATH

THE election issue of the country's largest circulation English weekly, in a sense caught the flavour of it all. Close to 40 pages were devoted to 'star campaigners'. We got to know their 'campaign clothes', their campaign cars, the food they ate. And all the other trivia you never wanted to know and were sure no one else would be dumb enough to ask. Anything, but the issues. And that was 40 pages of colour.

In no other election year have the media functioned as poorly as they did in this one. Taking satisfaction in the failure of psephologists to read the polls right is only evading the point. The growing disconnect between mass media and mass reality continues. They were wrong in reading – or

not reading – the issues. They continue to be wrong in reading the results. And the process.

For all the yowling on ‘stability’, the polls showed us the relative unimportance of that notion – at least of stability as measured in the media. And in the run up, there wasn’t even the faintest attempt to evaluate the performance of various governments and their platforms – especially if those belonged to the BJP.

**B**ut let’s step back a little. The entry of Sonia Gandhi into the poll campaign caused problems for media managers. They had all but installed a BJP government in their newspapers and channels – with only the minor hurdle of the popular vote to be overcome. Here, suddenly, was uncertainty. What if she pulled it off for the Congress? Could they afford to alienate her by continuing on the BJP bandwagon? What if the Congress won and was vindictive?

Sonia Gandhi may not have transformed the election results for her party, but she certainly had the media hedging its bets. Some sections of the press went a step further: From a ham-handed backing of the BJP, to a ‘Sonia is drawing bigger crowds than Indira ever did’ line. A pattern of coverage that was already personality driven now became doubly so. The remote possibility that important issues would be discussed in the media shrank further. As many as 200 farmers committed suicide in Andhra Pradesh, driven to desperation not just by their tragic experience with pesticides, but very significantly by the collapse of rural credit. This happened even as magazines and channels were focusing on their campaign stars and their campaign cars.

If there was one thing approaching an issue the media – or its dominant groups – did harp on, it was

‘stability’. By which was understood a government that could last its full term. Interminable discussions and mind-numbing edit-page pieces produced a few gems. ‘There ought to be legislation to give the government stability.’ ‘Once a government is elected, it ought to be allowed to complete a full five years.’ Quite a few expressed this view.

The notion that stability can be legislated was itself indicative of the level of debate. But it persisted. A lot of credence was given to the promise of some BJP leaders (one of some six million they made) that they would ‘take steps’ to reduce the number of elections. Yet, if ‘stability’ was the issue, then the Bharatiya Janata Party certainly deserved scrutiny. The evidence suggests that the BJP is the least competent party of governance among the major political formations.

**N**o BJP government in the history of this country has ever completed a five-year term. Not as the BJP, not in any other of its several *avatars* – as the Jana Sangh, as part of the Janata Party. And most of those BJP outfits that did stick on for a few years have been massively rejected in the next election. This is peculiar to the BJP. A TDP (under NTR), a DMK or AIADMK, a CPI(M) could complete one term and even win the next. The BJP does not seem capable of this. It just doesn’t seem able to run a government. It makes little difference whether it is an alliance government, as in Maharashtra, or one with a two-thirds majority, like the former BJP regime in Gujarat. They seem unable to manage ‘stability’.

Generally, going by trends in the past, in most states where it is in power, people tend to vote massively against the BJP. It could be suggested that Vaghela saved the BJP in Gujarat from the kind of rout it faced elsewhere. Romesh Bhandari certainly

did that party a great favour in Uttar Pradesh – its gains in the round of voting after his action against the Kalyan Singh government were significant. In Maharashtra, there is always Thackeray and the Shiv Sena to be blamed – but who could they blame for, say, Rajasthan? Or for the fact that a ‘strong’ BJP government in Gujarat brought itself down?

‘Give them a chance’ was another oft-heard refrain in the run-up to the last polls. Yet, the BJP has been given several chances and it fared badly each time. What has been that party’s performance in government? Take Maharashtra, where it has been in power along with the Shiv Sena for three years. Perhaps the largest number of extra-judicial, ‘encounter deaths’ in the country have taken place in Maharashtra, the bulk of them in Mumbai alone. In February this year, a little before the polls, official data showed a 100% increase in custodial deaths across the country. In Maharashtra, that increase was 506%! This did appear as a report in a few paras in a couple of papers. But there was virtually no comment on what it said about such governments. Uttar Pradesh, incidentally, showed a rise of 347% in custodial deaths.

**I**magine if either of these figures had been reported from Bihar or West Bengal. You’d never have heard the end of it. To begin with, it would have been, deservedly, on the front page. There would have been reams of denunciation and scathing comment. I could not trace one editorial that discussed what the data told us about the governments concerned.

Maharashtra was the first state to drop close to 2,000 cases of atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis. This was almost immediately after the Sena-BJP came to power. Remember that Gopinath Munde of the BJP is in

charge of these matters. Again, virtually no discussion. One of the most important planks on which the BJP-Sena came to power in Maharashtra was their anti-Enron campaign. Soon after assuming power, they rewarded that company with a bonanza bigger than that given it by the Congress. This, for the media, was 'welcome pragmatism and common sense.' There was no examination of the possibility of corruption. The same government that dropped all those cases had its police shoot dead eleven Dalits in an incident in Ramabhai Ambedkar Nagar. Pramod Mahajan paid the price for this in the polls – only to be immediately rewarded with higher things by his party.

**T**he BJP-Sena had another powerful campaign plank in 1995. Housing for 40 lakh people in Mumbai. That would help close to eight lakh families. The real performance of the BJP-Sena government's 'slum redevelopment scheme?' In over two years it managed to put up a building consisting of 128 tenements. Let's be generous and take the number of people housed in those tenements to be above the national average of 5.52 per household. It would still mean close to ten thousand years to keep that promise. Meanwhile, the same government has destroyed the shelter of many thousands in brutal slum demolitions.

This is also a state where the chief minister promotes superstition. Remember the 'miracle' of 1995 when idols of Ganesh began to gulp down mugs of milk? Hours into the milkfest, even as hysteria gripped Mumbai, Manohar Joshi spoke to the press. He said that he had lab-tested the miracle in his own house and was happy to pronounce it genuine. The miracle was now official!

At the end of several years of BJP rule, Rajasthan still ranks among the

worst states in terms of human development. It has an infant mortality rate of over 85. Its sex ratio actually worsened between 1981 and 1991. Female literacy here just scrapes past 20%. That's less than Bihar's and the worst among all Indian states. The state is now infamous for atrocities against women. Also for a government that shields the culprits and punishes the few cops who try to book them.

**I**n Gujarat, the BJP provided the least stable government in the country. A minister was stripped in public by his own partymen, by the 'disciplined cadres' of the RSS. A faction broke away to form the RJP government. Then a faction broke away from that to join the Janata Dal.

In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP has built a government of defectors – not just of the common or garden variety, but includes those facing criminal charges and known for their links with gangsters and mafiosi. Every one of these was rewarded with a ministership. Still, even by building a cabinet of 93 ministers, the BJP could not provide stability. The break-up of the Loktantrik Congress showed how fragile the whole edifice was and is. The U.P. Speaker has set extraordinary precedents in legitimising fraudulent defections in that state. Imagine if it had happened in a non-BJP state. The press would never have let you hear the end of it.

There was – and still is – another issue that is a 'no-no'. In the 50th year of freedom we have a prime minister whose role in the independence struggle was least distinguished. The only journal that did a serious investigation of this had Vajpayee himself conceding the veracity of its main findings – and withdrawing a lawyer's notice sent in haste to that journal. In election coverage in most societies that would have been an issue. Not

here. The last time it came up, one leading newspaper said: 'After all, he was 15 at the time.'

Remember also that 'give them a chance' went in tandem with the 'inherent instability' of coalition arrangements. The UF, the BJP repeatedly argued – to the delight of much of the press – was worse than a 13-headed Ravan. At least in mythology those many heads were united in purpose. Now that the BJP has no-one-quite-knows-how-many allies, there is very little discussion of the issue. And even less of corruption, with Sukh Ram becoming No. 2 in government in Himachal Pradesh.

**T**he irony of Yashwant Sinha's first statement as finance minister wasn't even noticed. On behalf of the *swadeshi* crowd he immediately reassured the multinationals that they had nothing to fear from a BJP government. You might expect a finance minister to direct his first assurances towards the poor of this country.

Nor was there serious criticism after the dirty trick played on P.A. Sangma in the name of consensus. Less than two hours after congratulating Sangma on his unanimous election to the post of Speaker, the BJP announced its support to the TDP candidate and present Speaker.

Does this mean the press and media cover issues better when it's a Congress government? In terms of the wide canvas, no. Through the period of Rao, the impact of Manmohanomics on, for instance, agricultural labour was ignored or played down. In class terms, the difference is narrow. But in terms of 'stability', 'corruption', 'morality', and good governance – the BJP comes up trumps. It may not have a clear majority in Parliament, even with its allies. But as of now, it seems to have a four-fifths majority in the media.

# Limits to swadeshi

C. RAMMANOHAR REDDY

THE election manifesto of the Bharatiya Janata Party contains a paragraph which in many ways is suggestive of the dilemma the BJP-led coalition government faces in making economic policy. While criticising the governments of independent India, the manifesto states that all through the past 50 years the BJP and its predecessor, the Jana Sangh, had 'opposed the license permit raj... opposed the command economy... opposed senseless central planning... opposed the inefficient state capitalism... opposed nationalization...' The BJP and the Jana Sangh 'had been urging a liberal economic regime in which the full creative genius of the Indian people could flower.'

After having seen the Congress(I) hijack its agenda for liberalisation in 1991-96 and the United Front follow much the same set of policies in 1996-98, the BJP has been in search of its own unique economic philosophy. For seven years it has looked for something distinctive to offer in the place of its original programme, though its natural inclination would have been to follow in the same direction as the Congress(I) government of P.V. Narasimha Rao. The *swadeshi* idea may have given the

party a semblance of a distinctive identity. But now that it is in power, the BJP finds that its dilemma has only worsened.

The Atal Behari Vajpayee government has to cope with pressures from many directions. It heads a coalition that is more hydra-headed than the UF. The non-BJP members of the coalition have no views on the economy other than the advancement of their sectional interests. The AIADMK (All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) has only Cauvery in mind, the Akali Dal higher procurement prices, the Biju Janata Dal another steel plant for Orissa. The BJP itself is pulled in two directions. There are the 'reformers' who would like to accelerate the process that was stalled in the mid-nineties, and there are the proponents of *swadeshi* who espouse a notion of economic nationalism that is yet to be defined. Whatever it does the BJP government will have to look over its shoulder at the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), which will monitor the implementation of the nebulous *swadeshi* programme.

The first real indication of where the BJP-led coalition is headed will be evident when Finance Minister

Yashwant Sinha presents the budget at the end of May or early June. But within a month of assuming office, there are some clues of the pulls and pressures operating on the government.

**F**irst, in early April the government announced a large bonus for wheat farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. This followed a couple of weeks of sustained pressure from the chief ministers of the three states (where either the party or one of its allies is in power) for a major revision in the procurement price for wheat. This sharp increase in the effective procurement price was completely unwarranted and will lead to higher prices at the public distribution system and in the market.

Second, the government announced major revisions to the Export-Import Policy for 1997-2002. Coming at a time when there is widespread concern about the sharp deceleration in export growth, the Ex-Im policy offered many incentives to exporters. However, what was significant from the swadeshi perspective was that the government continued with the process set in motion by the two previous governments of gradually removing the restrictions on imports of consumer goods. This is in keeping with the commitments that India has made to some of its major trading partners – especially the European Union – at the World Trade Organisation in Geneva. There was no question of slowing the process, leave alone rejecting the very notion of opening India further to the import of consumer goods – as would have been consistent with the idea of swadeshi. Yet, failure to remove some controls on import of consumer goods would have provoked trouble at the WTO.

Are we then going to witness 'realism' combined with 'populism' – two very value-loaded terms that the

financial press loves to use – from the BJP government rather than anything substantially different from the past? That is unlikely, because the BJP thrives on its distinctiveness and the economic interests that have supported it do have specific demands. The real question is how far the BJP government can or will want to 'deviate' from the past.

Take for instance the swadeshi programme. The BJP – at least a particular section within the party – has constructed powerful imagery around a concept that it has borrowed from the independence movement. But we must recognise swadeshi for what it is worth in the BJP's plan of action. Swadeshi is an idea that is being harnessed to give greater protection to Indian industry. It is in essence a concept that is being used for assisting one section of one part of the Indian economy. Whatever the other messages and slogans that can be read into the swadeshi slogan, it is in the present instance only a programme for aiding domestic industry.

**O**perationally, it will at best provide some incentives for Indian manufacturers while removing some others from foreign investors. Thus, one can visualise the government raising import duties – within the limits permissible under the commitments India has made at the WTO – on products where Indian industry has been hurt too much and too quickly. One can visualise a greater equality of tax treatment of Indian and foreign companies. One can also visualise higher barriers to foreign takeover of Indian companies. That foreign companies will henceforth find it that much more difficult to enter the consumer goods industry is another possibility. This is all part of the process of calibration that has been much talked about in recent months.

Some of these changes can be substantive within the particular sector in which they are situated. But when viewed in the larger context of the reform programme, they are at best tinkering at the margins.

Some of the limits placed on swadeshi are very much the dictates of the international market. While foreign investment still plays a marginal role in the Indian economy, external funds are substantial in certain areas. If investors from abroad are unnerved by certain policy decisions of the government, then they do have the potential to harm the economy by heading for the door.

**I**t will be simply impossible for the BJP coalition to remove, for instance, the flexibility given to foreign institutional investors in the stock markets. The stock markets have come to depend on these buyers and any large-scale withdrawal of funds will pull share prices down even further. A move to liquidate foreign holdings of shares in Indian markets will also quickly deplete the external reserves. And the last thing that the government wants to deal with at this point is another debt crisis. This is one important area where the BJP government will give a very limited operational content to swadeshi. The many statements made by the Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, about India needing foreign investment and those expressed earlier, during the election campaign, by both A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, about foreign investors being welcome must be seen in this context.

If a section of the BJP has made too much of swadeshi, if the media has joined in this exaggeration and if on top of it all there are clearly defined limits beyond which the government will not be able to give swadeshi its true early 20th century meaning, what

can there be distinctive about the BJP's economic programme? There are a few aspects of both the party's manifesto and the National Agenda which carry the stamp of the BJP and its coalition. There are first of all the two 'B's' – the programme for the *bhagidari* sector and the *berozgari hatao* programme.

**T**he BJP, and its forerunner the Jana Sangh, was for decades seen as a party of the small trader, the partnership firm and the middle class entrepreneur who had set up a small-scale enterprise. This is no longer the case, but the BJP has still found it necessary to promise more support to the *bhagidari* or unincorporated sector. As much importance was given in the election manifesto to this sector of the economy as to *swadeshi*. More finance has been promised, more tax breaks and greater social security. The issue was downplayed in the National Agenda but it still finds mention. However, the BJP will find it difficult to redeem these promises.

There is first the problem of identifying the *bhagidari* sector. It served the BJP well during the election campaign to combine transporters, hoteliers, builders, traders, doctors, priests, carpenters and those self-employed as part of one homogenous group. The reality is otherwise. Each category faces its own challenges and problems, so no single set of policies can work for all these economic agents. It is a different matter if the government sets out to only help the trading class, the traditional base of the BJP. The second problem is in the nature of help offered. The BJP has plans to increase institutional credit to the unincorporated or informal sector. But this is precisely what three decades of bank nationalisation – the same kind of nationalisation that has been subjected to criticism by the BJP

– was supposed to do and did in some measure.

Unemployment as a problem did find mention in the BJP manifesto – as it did in the manifestos of all parties – but it was in the National Agenda that the problem of unemployment was identified for special attention. A slogan too has been coined for the purpose – *berozgari hatao*. However, while unemployment, especially among the educated and in the towns and cities, is assuming serious proportions, poverty remains the real problem. Unemployment is linked to the absence of income-earning opportunities and poverty to the presence of low-productivity work. Special programmes for the unemployed do have a role to play – there are in any case plenty of them already – but what is needed is a more rapid and larger creation of high-productivity work.

**S**uch jobs can be created if the BJP's target of seven to eight per cent growth a year is realised over a fairly long period. Can the BJP-led coalition deliver? Does it have a concrete set of programmes? Unfortunately not. It is all very well to state that the reforms should be reformed and even better to say that India should be built by Indians. New names and new slogans – the *bhagidari* sector and *berozgari hatao* – may also evoke enthusiasm. But there is no substitute for a nuts-and-bolts plan of action. This is where there are few clues to the BJP coalition's thinking.

If there is one programme that everyone is agreed on, it is on reviving public investment. The BJP wants to increase these outlays; its political opponents too made a similar promise during the election; Indian industry demands it and both the supporters and critics of reforms are in agreement about the need for greater investment by the state.

It is an irony that from a neglect of public investment that came so easily in the early nineties there is now a near consensus on the need for greater outlays. Of course, different groups espouse a revival for different reasons. The organised sector of Indian industry, for instance, sees higher state investment as the only way in which flagging consumer demand can be raised. Some others see the neglect of public expenditure and an ill-conceived wooing of private and foreign investment as the main reason for the deterioration in infrastructure services. Yet others see the relative shunning of public expenditure on aspects of the social sector during the nineties as a huge wage that will soon come up for payment in the form of an unhealthy and ill-educated population. In the latter two arguments the concern is more for the medium and long-term than for the immediate future, as contained in the demand of Indian industry.

**T**he BJP in its election manifesto placed a high priority on mobilising larger savings for higher investment and one of the main sectors identified for a quantum leap in public investment is agriculture. The same set of priorities is outlined in the National Agenda. But is it possible to come even remotely near the BJP's target of earmarking 60% of the Plan outlay for agriculture and rural development? At present, it constitutes a little under 20% of the investment in the central plan. Tripling this proportion would mean either of two things. A large-scale diversion of resources from the other sectors – infrastructure, education, health, communication – is one option. Nobody can even think of increasing public investment in agriculture in this manner. However, if the BJP's target of a 60% allocation implies that it wants to triple the absolute



amount of resources that the Centre now spends on agriculture, this can be achieved by increasing total Plan investment by over 40% while keeping the outlay in the other sectors constant. This is equally infeasible, considering that it would imply a dramatic jump in total Plan investment.

**T**he specific numerical targets may not be as important as the direction in which the BJP government wants to move – to revive the importance of public investment in the economy. It is in this respect, more than anything else, that the new dispensation will find itself constrained by the parameters laid down by the two previous governments.

To increase public investment, the government needs more resources. The funds for a larger Plan outlay can be had by either increasing revenue or by reducing expenditure in non-productive areas. The tax revenue of the Centre has been compromised by the ill-conceived 1997-98 budget of the UP government. Yashwant Sinha cannot even dream of correcting last year's mistake of lowering tax rates by now hiking them. Since so much of economic performance has to do with expectations and perceptions, the introduction of higher tax rates will send negative signals to the markets, snuffing out whatever hopes there are of a recovery. Revenue can also be expanded if the public sector enterprises yield a higher dividend. Though there has been some improvement in the performance of the public sector in recent years, it cannot easily throw off the neglect it has suffered during the nineties.

If a substantial increase in revenue is not a possibility, savings in expenditure are even less likely. The two biggest consumers of non-productive expenditure are the wage and salary bill of the government and

interest payments on market loans. The polity is a long way off from a consensus on reducing the size of government. And interest payments have ballooned as the government, since the early nineties, has shifted towards the market to bridge the fiscal deficit.

There appears then little likelihood of Yashwant Sinha producing a budget that will mark a turning point in public investment. It is possible over the medium-term to substantially increase tax revenue, enable the public sector to perform far more efficiently and perhaps even reduce the staff strength of the government establishment. But no dramatic changes can be expected in the first budget of the BJP-led coalition government.

**I**n the end, after all the sound and fury about swadeshi, one can expect the BJP government to continue with the broad thrust of the policies of the past seven years. There will be no dramatic changes. There will, of course, be certain special programmes designed to leave a BJP imprint on economic policy. But whether on swadeshi, bhagidari or berozgari – these unique features will, however, be more in the nature of frills to border the government's economic policy. The substantive changes will be few and far between.

That the BJP has to please all the members of its coalition is one reason why the government will find itself unable to do anything dramatic about the economy. However, that is only one reason. More importantly, too much time has been spent on sloganeering about swadeshi and too little on the nitty-gritty of an alternative economic framework. Now that it is in power the BJP finds that it cannot do much about translating swadeshi into action. Over the next year or so the swadeshi slogan will be shown up to be just that, a slogan.

# Alliances '98

CHANDRIKA PARMAR

COALITIONS and alliances have become dirty words in Indian politics. Not that alliances have been absent from our politics; but they have failed to acquire the aura of legitimacy in the national psyche and continue to be viewed as impious and promiscuous. There are several reasons why such an impression persists. One reason is that the term has always been conceived in a very narrow sense, suggesting a union between parties in government. But what this conception of the term

obscures is the fact that parties themselves reflect a coalition of diverse interests. In this sense, the one party dominant phase in Indian politics was also the period of 'consensual' coalition.

The Congress system, multi-group in character, was always a system of coalitions and informed by a continuous process of internal bargaining and mobility. In fact, it owed the sustenance of its position of dominance to its 'permeability'. Seen from

this telescope, all political parties are an aggregation of competing interests and in that sense a coalition. However, this paper does not intend to look at intra-party coalitions. Instead, it will focus on alliance related strategies adopted by the main political contenders, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Congress and the United Front (UF) in the pre-election phase of the 1998 Lok Sabha elections and the success or failure of these strategies.

*The BJP:* In the 1998 elections, the BJP's share of the national vote was 25.5%, 5.2% more than its national share in 1996. It won 178 seats, up only by 17 from its national total in 1996. Yet it formed the government heading an alliance of 252 members in Parliament. How did it achieve this? What was its strategy? This question acquires salience especially since the BJP contested only 380 seats in 1998 as compared to 471 in 1996.

**A** combination of factors brought the BJP to power in the Lok Sabha. The first was the recognition by its leaders that the party's support base had hit a plateau and forging strategic alliances with regional parties could be instrumental in maximizing seats. As a conscious decision, alliances were forged with the AIADMK and its allies in Tamil Nadu, the Lok Shakti in Karnataka, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Orissa and the Trinamul Congress (TC) in West Bengal. These alliances, besides its longer-term ties with the Samata Party in Bihar (extended to U.P. in 1998), the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP), the Shiromani Akali Dal (established after the 1996 election) and with its natural ally, the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, were clearly forged with the goal of seat maximization.

The dilution of its ideology was a key to the BJP's success in the 1998 Lok Sabha. This was necessitated by a need to draw more allies into its fold.

While the Ayodhya agitation was primarily responsible for BJP's great leap forward, it had also conferred political untouchability upon it. Alliances were possible only if it abandoned its ideological purity. The BJP had to be given a 'softer look'.

**A**ccordingly, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, widely seen as the moderate face of BJP, was projected as the prime ministerial candidate. The manifesto talked of 'all the consensual, legal and constitutional means to facilitate the construction of the Shri Ram Mandir at Ayodhya.' As a step towards consensual politics, BJP for the first time indicated that if it found itself leading a coalition government, it would follow the common minimum programme in which Article 370, Uniform Civil Code and Ayodhya may not find a place in deference to the wishes of its allies.

The BJP in the South was given an acceptable local face and there was tacit admission that Hindu nationalism was only a secondary aspect of the more vital sub-nationalism. Doctrinal compromises were made: Hindi, Ayodhya and Aryavarta gave way to local languages, local nationalism and a dilution of extremist vocabulary. In forging key regional alliances, the BJP

did not balk at being a junior partner to local parties.

**S**imultaneously, as a strategy of vote maximization, the doors were thrown open to individuals of different parties. The induction of Aslam Sher Khan (Congress MP from Madhya Pradesh) and Ayub Khan (Congress MP from Rajasthan) was used to send a positive message to the Muslim community. It had to find a way to increase its vote/seat share so that it had the critical numbers to be invited to form the government.

*The Congress:* Congress won 141 seats of the 474 it contested in the 1998 elections, securing 25.9% of votes – a marginal increase of one seat and a fall of 4% in national vote share in comparison to its 1996 tally. In appearance it seems to be a party in decline. Unlike the BJP, which was clear about its strategy, the Congress found itself floundering after having forced the election over the Jain Commission report. The continuous drop in votes, the Congress itself acknowledged, was a consequence of a gradual desertion by its electoral base. For an umbrella party which derived its electoral victories by building coalitions out of disparate social groups, the Congress faced a basic threat to its

Electoral Performance 1952-1998

Year	BJP			INC		
	Contested	Win	% Votes	Contested	Win	% Votes
1952	94	39	3.1	479	364	45.0
1957	130	4	5.9	490	371	47.8
1962	196	14	6.4	488	361	44.7
1967	251	35	9.4	516	283	40.8
1971	160	22	7.4	441	352	43.7
1977	NA	91	14.0	492	154	34.5
1980	NA	15	8.6	492	353	42.7
1984	229	2	7.4	517	415	48.1
1989	226	86	11.5	510	197	39.5
1991	468	120	20.1	492	232	36.5
1996	471	161	20.3	529	140	28.8
1998	380	179	25.9	474	141	25.8

1952-71: Contested as Bharatiya Jana Sangh

1977: Contested as Bharatiya Lok Dal (part of Janata Party)

1980: First time as BJP

# ALLIANCES '98

STATE/ NO OF SEATS	BJP+ (Contested-Win-Votes%)	UF (Contested-Win-Votes %)	INC+ (Contested-Win-Votes%)
ANDHRA PRADESH(42)	<b>BJP+TDP(LP)</b> BJP: 39-4-18.3 TDP(LP) 3-0-1.2	<b>TDP+Left+JD</b> TDP: 35-12-32.0 CPM: 3-0-2.9 JD: 1-0-0.9 CPI: 3-2-2.6	INC: 42-22-38.5
ASSAM(14)	BJP: 14-1-24.5	<b>AGP+Left+JD</b> AGP: 9-0-12.7 CPI: 1-1-1 CPM: 3-1-3.3 JD: 1-0-0.1	<b>INC+UMF</b> CONG: 13-10-40.0 UMF: 1-1-4.3
BIHAR(54)	<b>BJP+SAP</b> BJP: 32-19-23.5 SAP: 21-10-16.0 (in Hajipur -no candidate against Paswan)	<b>UF alliance in 43</b> JD: 29-1-8.6 CPI: 12-0-3.5 CPM: 2-0-0.4 (Confests within UF): JD against CPI-5 JD against CPM-2	<b>INC+RJD+JMM+RJP+SJP</b> RJD: 27-17-26.3 RJP: 2-0- SJP: 2-0-1.2 (Cong. against RJD-10 & JMM-5)
HARYANA(10)	<b>HVP+BJP</b> HVP: 4-1-11.6 BJP: 6-1-18.9	<b>HLD(R)+BSP</b> HLD: 7-4-23.9 BSP: 3-1-7.7	INC: 10-3-26.0
KARNATAKA(28)	<b>BJP+LS</b> LS: 10-3-11.5 BJP: 18-13-27.0	<b>JD+Left</b> JD: 27-3-21.7 CPM: 1-0-0.1	INC: 28-9-36.2
KERALA(20)	BJP: 20-0-8.0	<b>LDF</b> CPM: 9-6-21.0 CPI: 4-2-8.3 JD: 2-0-3.9 RSP: 1-1-2.7 [(Cong(S), KCJ, LDF supp. ind-2)]	<b>UDF</b> INC: 17-8-38.7 IUML: 2-2-5.0 KCM: 1-1-2.4
MAHARASHTRA(48)	<b>BJP+Shiv Sena</b> BJP: 26-4-22.5 Shiv Sena:21-6-19.7 (supp. Kalmadi in Pune)	JD: 17-0-1.7 CPI: 3-0- CPM: 2-0-0.1 PWP: 2-1-8.7 Bhartiya Panther: 1-0-*	<b>CONG+RPI+SP</b> CONG: 41-33-43.6 RPI: 4-4-4.4 SP: 3-0-2.7
ORISSA(21)	<b>BJP+BJD</b> BJP: 9-7-21.2 BJD: 12-9-27.5	<b>JD+CPI+CPM</b> JD: 17-0-4.9 CPI: 2-0-1 CPM: 2-0-4	INC: 21-5-41.0
PUNJAB(13)	<b>SAD(B)+BJP</b> BJP: 3-3-11.7 SAD(B) 8-8-32.9 (Supp Gujral in Jalandhar)	CPM: 3-0-3.4	<b>INC+BSP+CPI</b> INC: 8-0-25.9 CPI: 1-0-3.4 BSP: 4-0-12.7
TAMIL NADU(39)	<b>AIADMK+BJP+MDMK+JP+PMK +RTC (Ramamurthy)</b> AIADMK: 22-18-25.9 BJP: 5-3-6.9 PMK: 5-4-6.1 MDMK: 5-3-6.3 JP: 1-1-1.0 RTC: 1-1-N.A	<b>DMK+TMC+CPI</b> DMK: 17-5-20.1 TMC: 20-3-20.1 CPI: 2-1-2.5	INC: 35-0-4.7
UTTAR PRADESH(85)	<b>BJP+BSP(J)+SAP</b> BJP: 78-57-36.5 SAP: 2-2-0.8 (Supp. Maneka Gandhi in Pilibhit)	SP: 82-20-28.7 JD: 23-0-0.5 CPI: 6-0-0.2 CPM: 2-0-0.2	<b>INC+BKKP</b> CONG: 79-0-6.0 BKKP: 6-0-0.1
WEST BENGAL(42)	<b>Trinamul Cong+BJP</b> TNC: 29-7-24.4 BJP: 13-1-10.2	<b>Left Front</b> CPM: 32-24-35.4 CPI: 3-3-3.7 FBL: 3-2-3.3 RSP: 4-4-4.9	INC: 39-1-15.2 SFB: 2-0- Jharkhand Party: 1-0-*

# Social Bases of Political Parties

Year Background Characteristic	1996					1998			
	INC+	BJP+	NF	LF	BSP	INC	BJP+	UF	BSP
All India Average	27.5	24.9	10.1	7.5	3.4	27.3	32.9	19.2	2.9
<b>Gender</b>									
Female	27.6	23.0	9.4	7.6	3.1	28.0	29.5	19.6	2.8
Male	27.4	26.8	10.8	7.4	3.6	26.5	36.3	18.7	3.0
<b>Locality</b>									
Rural	28.1	22.6	10.6	8.8	3.8	27.0	31.8	19.6	3.1
Urban	25.6	32.2	8.7	3.4	2.0	28.2	36.3	17.7	2.4
<b>Age</b>									
Up to 25 years	25.7	27.0	10.2	6.9	3.8	24.4	35.0	17.8	4.3
26-35 years	27.1	25.5	9.9	7.7	3.5	27.5	33.9	18.6	2.6
36-45 years	28.8	25.1	9.7	8.1	2.9	27.4	32.4	20.5	2.6
46-55 years	27.0	23.6	10.2	8.4	3.5	28.2	32.0	21.5	2.2
56 years and above	30.0	21.3	10.9	6.4	2.9	29.7	29.9	18.2	2.6
<b>Education</b>									
Illiterate	28.6	21.1	12.3	6.6	5.0	29.1	28.9	18.3	4.0
Up to middle	28.4	23.8	9.2	8.9	2.8	26.9	34.3	20.8	2.4
College no degree	25.8	31.3	8.0	7.7	1.6	25.7	36.5	19.1	1.8
Graduate and above	21.1	36.7	6.1	6.0	0.9	21.5	42.5	16.6	1.6
<b>Occupation</b>									
Unskilled worker	30.6	17.0	9.9	10.8	5.2	34.6	23.0	21.4	4.1
Agricultural & allied worker	28.4	17.8	11.5	8.9	5.2	26.2	26.2	24.5	4.5
Artisans & skilled worker	27.3	24.1	9.3	7.7	3.0	26.9	30.6	23.1	2.1
Cultivators with less than 5 acres	26.1	26.2	14.0	6.4	4.9	21.7	32.8	18.3	3.1
Cultivators with more than 5 acres	29.7	34.6	8.2	1.6	2.5	31.1	41.9	10.8	2.0
Business	23.3	33.0	10.1	7.6	0.7	26.2	37.9	21.5	1.5
White collar & professional	26.2	30.8	5.6	8.0	0.3	24.5	39.6	15.7	1.0
<b>Caste</b>									
Scheduled Caste	31.6	14.4	5.6	11.0	12.1	29.6	20.9	22.2	11.2
Scheduled Tribe	39.2	19.0	6.2	6.5	1.0	41.9	25.6	11.6	0.4
Other Backward Castes	21.7	23.6	16.3	5.9	2.3	22.5	34.6	21.0	1.6
Upper Castes	28.4	33.6	7.1	7.3	0.4	28.1	38.5	17.4	1.1
<b>Religion</b>									
Hindu	26.2	28.9	8.4	7.4	3.7	25.6	37.4	17.4	3.0
Muslim	35.3	3.1	25.3	10.1	1.2	35.1	6.8	34.4	1.3
Christian	39.9	3.0	2.0	5.6	—	42.1	9.1	18.6	0.4
Sikh	18.3	14.3	16.7	2.4	5.6	21.9	39.8	18.0	10.2
Other	26.5	6.0	12.0	2.4	4.8	39.5	19.7	3.9	10.5
<b>Economic Class</b>									
Very poor	29.6	16.0	10.7	11.3	4.4	27.3	27.1	23.7	2.7
Poor	28.3	23.1	10.5	6.7	4.7	27.4	31.8	19.0	3.3
Middle	26.1	31.1	10.9	5.6	2.2	26.9	37.3	16.6	2.7
Upper	22.4	40.1	7.9	3.4	0.4	28.3	38.9	14.3	1.9

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Note: Parties here represent pre-poll alliances;

1996: INC+(INC+AIADMK), BJP+(BJP+Samata+Shiv Sena+Haryana Vikas Party), NF(JD+Samajwadi Party) and LF(CPM+CPI+RSP+FBL)

1998: INC(alone), BJP+(BJP+Samata+Shiv Sena+Haryana Vikas Party+AIADMK+Akali Dal+Trinamul Congress+Lok Shakti+Biju Janata Dal), TDP(NTR), UF+(Janta Dal+SP(Mulayam)+TDP(N)+AGP+TMC+DMK+MGP+CPI+CPI(M)+RSP+FBL)

survival when confronted with desertions from diverse groups.

As a strategy for seat maximization the Congress, like the BJP, looked for pre-poll alliances. For Congress then, it was more a question of putting its own house in order, avoiding possible splits and defections while also negotiating alliances. Negotiations with the BSP in Madhya Pradesh, Lok Shakti in Karnataka, Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh did not succeed. However, it did come to seat sharing arrangements with the BSP in Punjab, RJD in Bihar, and the Samajwadi Party and the Republican Party of India in Maharashtra, while continuing its older alliance with UDF in Kerala. Unlike BJP, the Congress was not content to be a junior partner in regional alliances; instead, it sought to dictate alliance terms rather unsuccessfully.

**T**he single most significant factor for Congress was Sonia Gandhi's decision to campaign for the party. While at one level her entry muffled dissent, her campaigns became the rallying point for party workers and for appealing to minorities by expressing regret for Operation Blue Star and the demolition of the Babri Masjid. But, her entry also resulted in the distancing of some potential allies, e.g., Ramakrishna Hegde who moved towards the rival BJP.

*The UF:* In 1998, the share of the UF was 21.9% of national votes, a fall of almost 7% from 28.5 in 1996. It is a front of 17 political parties, mainly formations thrown up by the mandalisation of politics. It has a lower caste base along with a strong Muslim support base. Most of its partners have a regional appeal. Although, some parties of the front fought the 1996 elections together, UF in its present form was a post-poll alliance to keep the BJP from forming the government. Its government lasted 19 months and

came to an end when the Congress withdrew support. In 1996, the UF was in power in as many as 10 states, a number which has now come down.

**I**n the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the challenge before the UF was to maximize seats by keeping the alliance partners together. However, several problems surfaced in its camp. A major problem related to the arrangement regarding sharing of seats. The core committee decided that seats would be divided among partners on the basis of the party that was dominant in the state. But this led to a breakdown of understanding between the UF constituents.

In U.P., Mulayam Singh Yadav rejected the claims of the Janata Dal, the CPI and CPI(M), arguing that none of them could win any seats in the state. Thus, these parties put up their own candidates against the Samajwadi Party. In Tamil Nadu, Janata Dal withdrew all its candidates from the fray and boycotted the meeting of the prime minister with the TMC-DMK leaders. The CPI(M) withdrew four candidates, but put up two candidates against the TMC-DMK-CPI combine. Throughout the country, 45 UF candidates were pitted against their own partner parties.

*Success/Failure:* Going purely by the 1998 results, the BJP proved to be more successful as compared to its rivals in terms of maximizing seats. Its strategy helped the party secure the maximum number of pre-poll alliances, though this was insufficient to form a government. All-India figures reveal that it polled 25% vote and its allies added a significant 11.2%. Moreover, the main areas of expansion for the BJP-led front in this election were from a strata of the population where it had traditionally been weak: the OBCs, the poor, the less educated and from rural areas.

In the southern states (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh) out of the 50 seats won by the BJP alliance, 20 were won by BJP itself. The alliances' vote share in these states was 33.9%, the BJP's individual share was 16.6%, an indication of the success of the alliances. The alliance in Tamil Nadu was most fruitful, grabbing victory in 30 out of the 39 seats, gaining at the cost of the UF constituents. Kerala was the only major state that did not send a BJP candidate to the Lok Sabha. In the East (Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar), of the 53 seats won by the BJP alliance, only 27 were won by the BJP of which 19 were from Bihar. The vote share of the BJP and its allies in this region was 37.4%, BJP constituting 16.6%.

**T**hough the BJP won a smaller share of seats than its allies in all these states (except Karnataka), its gains were crucial compensation for its losses in Maharashtra and Rajasthan, at the same time enhancing its credibility as a party with an all-India presence. Through its alliances the BJP has also been able to establish political and organizational beachheads in these regions. The Congress has little to show by way of immediate gains in the 1998 elections. In the three key states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, which account for 179 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress tally is 15. Its alliances in Maharashtra paid rich dividends. The party's vote share in the state rose to 42.6% in 1998 from 34.8% in 1996, translating to 33 of the 48 seats, while its ally, the RPI, got four seats (4.1% votes). The Congress had worked early to bring the Republican Party of India and the Samajwadi Party into an alliance while simultaneously putting its own house in order and ensuring unity within the Maharashtra unit. In Kerala the long-standing partnership with the UDF

gave Congress a stable base to fight from; this also holds a lesson in alliance making.

The results from Maharashtra and Rajasthan indicate that it is too early to write off the party. The Congress continues to maintain a fairly high vote in many other large states: Andhra Pradesh (37.8%), Gujarat (34.8%), Karnataka (36.2%), and Orissa (41%). Future alliance strategies and internal management of the party organization could either rejuvenate it or lead to its demise.

The UF regional partners enjoyed mixed fortunes: humiliation in Tamil Nadu, big losses in Assam and a respectable outcome for its constituent, TDP, in Andhra (12 seats constituting 31.5% votes). The Samajwadi Party fought and retained 18 seats constituting nearly 27.7% of votes. The decline of the Janata Dal at an all-India level weakened the UF's position. It left the BJP as the chief gainer in Karnataka and Orissa. The data on the three states – Bihar, Orissa and Karnataka – in which the decline of the Janata Dal has been most significant, is interesting. The splits within Janata Dal tell the story of its decline.

**T**he vote share of the Janata Dal in Bihar was 8.3%, that of the RJD 25.2%, a combined total of 32%. This was the Janata Dal's vote share in the 1996 elections. In Orissa the Janata Dal's vote share in 1996 was 30.1%; in 1998 this fell to 7%, with the BJD winning 27.3% of the popular vote.

In Karnataka it is clear that the alliance with the Lok Shakti was crucial for the BJP. The Janata Dal's vote share in Karnataka was 34.9% in 1996; in 1998 it fell to 21.3%. Lok Shakti won 11.5%, while the BJP vote rose only marginally, from 24.8% in 1996 to 26.4% in 1998. However, the BJP-Lok Shakti combine won 37.7% ensuring it the single largest number

of seats in the state. If Hegde had chosen to align with the Congress or stay with the Janata Dal, the Karnataka scene may have been very different.

Alliances as a strategy of electoral competition have come to stay; seat maximization and alliances go hand in hand in the present political scenario. In broad terms this is leading to the emergence of a model at the Centre where smaller parties are aligning with one or the other national party. Neither the Congress nor the BJP are untouchable for regional parties as demonstrated by the leaders of regional parties like the Asom Gana Parishad, National Conference and the Telugu Desam.

**S**imultaneously, faced with stubborn limits that the mobilization of a multiplicity of social groups in the country places on the expansion of political parties, it can be argued that they will have to tone down their aggressive rhetoric and build more inclusive social coalitions than before. Faced with the compulsions of brokering alliances in a hung Parliament, where each party needs the support of other parties to form a government, political parties would need to moderate their rhetoric. A political system composed of multiple social groups and multiple parties, none of which are strong enough on their own to come to power, would seem to naturally exert a strong centripetal influence on party behaviour.

It should not be a surprise if the first few experiences of coalition government produce an atmosphere of instability. As the new rules of the game evolve, the growing pressure on the new governments to meet social needs and accommodate interests will lead to yet greater emphasis on performance. Hopefully this will lead to a more responsive and integrated polity, with politicians and political parties more sensitive to citizen concerns.

# Books

**STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT, GLOBAL  
TRADE AND THE NEW POLITICAL  
ECONOMY OF DEVELOPMENT** by Biplab  
Dasgupta. Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

THERE is a mindset that believes in the following description of the global business environment. International trade is inherently unfair because developed countries of the North distort rules of the game. The South (developing countries) finds it difficult to push up exports. Although GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) has brought down tariffs, the North resorts to non-tariff barriers. With constant or shrinking markets, because demand for primary commodities (major export earners for the South) goes down as production structures change, developing countries begin to undercut each other's export prices in an attempt to increase export volumes. This contributes to deterioration in the terms of trade facing the South, the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis. Imports can't be slashed because they are essential for growth. Faced with trade or current account deficits, developing countries have to borrow. But concessional lending is not available. Hence one borrows from the commercial

market and keeps borrowing to repay earlier debt. The net transfer of resources to the South becomes negative and one is stuck in a debt trap.

The rules of this unfair North-South game need to change. There should be a New International Economic Order (NIEO), with fairer rules for the South. Pity this has not come about, despite UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). South-East (socialist countries) trade games were so much better, except that the East has collapsed. Nothing seems to be happening on South-South trade and economic cooperation either. Why can't the South bargain collectively? Why can't G-77 and the non-aligned movement (NAM) be resurrected? Not only is fair trade not being ensured, the North, led naturally by the United States is clamouring for free trade and thrusting liberalization down the throats of the South. This is being done through structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, in spite of evidence that such structural adjustment policies don't succeed.

The so-called Washington consensus has now found an ally in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Consider how unfair the Uruguay Round agreement



was. GATT had no business to discuss services, or trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS), or trade-related investment measures (TRIMS). GATT's original mandate was negotiations on external sector policies, not domestic economic policies and it should have stuck to that. While the South suffers and is forced to open up, the North retains protectionism through anti-dumping, agricultural subsidies, quotas in textiles and garments, environmental measures, labour standards, restrictions on cross-border movements of labour (but not capital), and even flouts multilateral agreements through unilateral actions like Section 301 provisions. Nothing is done on restrictive business practices of multinationals. Where is the UN Code on Technology Transfer? The North even goes around pirating southern biodiversity through patents on *haldi*, *neem* and *basmati*.

This simplistic diagnosis may or may not be accurate. But in a country that has still not overcome the colonial legacy, there are people who empathize with this view. And there are also those who believe in it. After all, this diagnosis has the virtue of simplicity. Everything is clear in black and white. Like a formula Hindi film, you know the bad guys and the good guys from the first scene.

Biplab Dasgupta is such a believer, a fact which is known to all those familiar with his earlier work and background. A quote from the introduction will illustrate the thrust of this volume: 'For a majority of the less developed countries (LDCs) of the world today, structural adjustment is a fact of life. Sponsored by the World Bank in 1980, this package of policies is supplemented by the stabilization package sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).... These packages were originally introduced as short-term remedies to rectify severe imbalances in external and internal accounts in a large number of countries. However, once initiated, very few countries have succeeded in growing out of them, as one lending programme has followed another.'

The context is naturally India. As the Prologue states, 'The idea of a book on structural adjustment was originally promoted by the decision of the new Indian government, led by Narasimha Rao, to introduce structural adjustment in India in July 1991.... What has emerged, after several years of hard work, is an attempt at a comprehensive critical analysis of the Fund-Bank approach on development in less developed countries.... A negative consequence of this exercise is that the proposed book on India's experience with structural adjustment still remains to be written.'

There is much to disagree with, on facts as well as their interpretation. For example, the author does not seem to have read the Uruguay Round agreement, the references are exclusively to second-hand sources, which are not always accurate. But it is difficult to argue with those for whom the afore-mentioned simplistic diagnosis is an article of faith. Like religion, this diagnosis is an opiate for our left-wing academics (and politicians, since Biplab Dasgupta is a bit of both) and how does one argue about religion?

Subject to this bias and subject to the need to distort facts to fit a theory, this volume is well-researched and covers an enviable breadth of canvas. This is true of all six chapters on the new political economy of development, structural adjustment, the world trade system, environment, East Asia and a global overview. (There are two additional chapters that constitute the introduction and the conclusion.) Since the book was overtaken by the East Asia financial crisis, there is also an epilogue on that. The moral is simple and provides more grist to the mill. 'The helplessness of these countries, despite impressive growth rates, against the onslaught of obsessive speculators such as Soros, is a warning to other LDCs who are being goaded by the World Bank and IMF to take the express route to full convertibility of local currencies.'

If you are not a politician, read the book by all means. But if you are a politician, better stay away. You might seriously begin to believe that WTO agreements can and should be re-negotiated.

**Bibek Debroy**

**THE DISPOSSESSED: Victims of Development in Asia** edited by Vinod Raina, Aditi Chowdhury and Sumit Chowdhury. Arena Press, Hong Kong, 1998.

THERE are anniversaries and anniversaries. In the last year, while the country celebrated, even if in a desultory manner, the 50th anniversary of its independence from colonial rule, we were also forced to remember the trauma of Partition and the assassination of Gandhi. With him was also buried (only metaphorically) among the more trenchant critiques of development as we have come to experience it. Development, Gandhi warned us, was no unfolding of human capabilities and entitlements, but a conjuncturally specific path of material progress based on an exploitation of both man and nature. A necessary concomitant of modern civilization, the development process leaves behind in its wake victims, the left-overs and the dregs who are made

redundant – their skills, lifestyles, worldviews, even their labour power no longer of use.

For much of this century, this debate was couched in the somewhat sterile polarities of capitalism vs. socialism. Radical critics argued that if only property relations were appropriately altered, beneficial and equitable growth could be ensured. Having dismissed the likes of Gandhi as ‘backward’ and ante-diluvian, they rarely bothered to examine the real discontents of the modern growth process.

It is only now, with the socialist project in tatters and, the environmental and ecological crises assuming dangerous proportions, that development theorists have started seriously engaging with issues of sustainability and survival. Had they bothered to listen to ordinary people, we may all have been saved some misery.

Among the landmarks pushing us into reexamining our presuppositions about development is Bhopal. It will soon be 15 years since the tragedy and it does none of us any credit that a vast majority of the victims are still seeking justice. The Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), a Hong Kong based regional NGO, was among the first organizations to chronicle and analyze the carnage wreaked by the Union Carbide on thousands of innocent families. Subsequently it co-sponsored the Permanent People’s Tribunal on industrial disasters in Bhopal and Bangkok and worked for the formation of a coalition of the Asian Victims of a Hazard Free Environment. Over the years its perspective widened to look not only at mega disasters and projects, but also the silent and more endemic processes of degradation of the environment, the cornering of the natural resource base by state and corporation, leading to dislocation and displacement – in brief the crisis of survival.

*The Dispossessed* is a chilling chronicle of these processes. Through detailed case studies of 10 Asian nations – China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand – prepared by scholars and activists, it forces the reader to confront a balance sheet rarely presented by the UN or the World Bank.

Take the chapter on India. Not only are we provided case material on the Narmada Valley Project, the Tehri Hydroelectric Project, the Bhopal Gas Leak, the Balliapol Missile Test Range, the Chilka Shrimp Farm and the West Coast Power Projects but also discussion on a lack of basic amenities, child exploitation, corruption, debt and deficit, dumping, forest depletion, health hazards, pollution, industrial sickness – and the list

goes on. As comprehensive a documentation as any that this reader is familiar with.

The range of countries and cases covered provide telling evidence that the problem cannot be traced to specific projects, locations, political systems or levels of development. Let us not forget that the official Japanese response to the Minimata poisoning was no different from the way our political and corporate elites reacted to Bhopal. Try and bury the event. If that becomes impossible, then apologize and explain it away as a one-off case. Never is it accepted that the flaw is deeper, located in the development process itself.

This collection highlights another process, which is often missed. People are never passive victims. They struggle, often collectively, not only for redressal and justice but also for altering the ways in which our societies have organized their production processes. Even more, for changing the terms of discourse on what constitutes worthwhile development. It is this twin tendency that makes this book essential reading.

There is a minor downside. Expectedly, the different country contributions display an unevenness in both coverage and quality. All share a somewhat naive radical romanticism about people’s struggles and the potential of experimental alternatives to counter the currently hegemonic view. There is also an insufficient engaging with the tendency towards globalisation of capital and production. Above all, there is little effort at prioritizing the different issues. Surely, the argument is not that all ills that we confront can be traced to the same central processes. That would be a case of extreme reductionism.

Nevertheless, as a resource book for those keen to search out new ways of organizing life, *The Dispossessed* fills a vital gap. We now have Asian, not just western material to think about. For this, both the editors and the publisher deserve our thanks.

Seminarist

**GREENING AT THE GRASSROOTS: Alternative Forestry Strategies in India** by Eva Cheung Robinson. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

MOST historians, anthropologists and sociologists of contemporary India are united in their critique of centralized management of forest resources. They agree that the administration of these resources should be decentralized in a way that takes local knowledge and practices into account. However, the nature of institutional structures and decentralization have been

subject to much debate. While some scholars argue that forest management should be left to the village communities, others support joint forest management (JFM) efforts that have been put into action in the 1990s. In joint forest management, NGOs play a crucial mediating role between the local people and the forest department.

Eva Cheung Robinson's book has to be read in the context of this debate. In the main, the author is in favour of NGO initiatives in the forestry sector. Through her work with three NGOs in Andhra Pradesh she argues that these organizations provide a new 'organizational culture' for forest management. The success of these NGOs – RGHBMSS, GORD, and KIPDOW – is attributed to their awareness of traditional knowledge systems. This is in sharp contrast to the organizational culture set up by the Forest Department which is impersonal and informed by modern knowledge systems.

As Robinson sees it, the history of forestry as described by Tariq Banuri, Frederique Marglin and others is a story of the confrontation between modern and traditional knowledges. In this context she argues that social forestry in post-independence India is based on the false assumption that the fuelwood crisis in the country can be traced to the degradation of the forests caused by excessive local use. Instead, she links the degradation of forests to its commercial and industrial uses. According to the author it is erroneous to think that social forestry resulted in any benefit to the rural poor since more commercially viable species were planted instead of species for local use. She contrasts the social forestry programme with non-modern subsistence forestry programmes. These are initiated by NGOs in Andhra and are more conducive to the needs of the people. Overall she concludes that forestry initiatives which are initiated and monitored by NGOs are more successful in meeting the needs of the people than government forestry programmes.

Though the book records some valuable forestry experiments in Andhra Pradesh, its conceptual framework remains problematic. The dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' knowledge does not measure up to any rigorous historical analysis. There have been numerous instances where scientific forestry had to take traditional knowledge into account. A good example of this is the propagation of lac in 19th century Central Provinces. The managing agencies had to rely on the Gonds' expertise to make their operations commercially viable. The basis of 'scientific forestry' was rooted in the knowledge of the local people. As

such, the generalizations developed by Ashis Nandy, Tariq Banuri, Frederique Marglin and others need to be modified.

The second important point that can be made vis-à-vis the relationship of traditional and modern knowledge relates to the way in which the question itself is framed. The case of lac propagation shows that the forest administration did not show more sensitivity to local needs by incorporating local knowledge into its ambit. In fact, this led to the further marginalisation of the household economy. Thus, the crucial issue is not whether traditional knowledge is incorporated into forest administration, but whether such an inclusion leads to an alteration in the prevailing power relations such that they are tilted in favour of the rural poor. Added to this, we must also ask if the measures adopted by NGOs and others lead to a change in these relations? The author fails to address these concerns.

Finally, this book raises the issue of biotic pressures on forests. Questions relating to local uses of forests are intimately linked with forest conservation. Today there is a great gap between supply and demand for fuel and fodder. This has increased the pressure on forests. In this context it is pertinent to examine the argument that the primary responsibility for the degradation of forests rests with industrial and commercial activity. While it is true that commercial activity has led to irreparable damage to the forests, the aim of forest conservation cannot be met solely by prohibiting commercial and industrial use of forests. It is well acknowledged that the natural forests of the country cannot be saved if the needs of the local people are not sufficiently met. The book fails to take this argument into account because the theme of conservation is by and large ignored. Hence, its discussion of alternative forestry strategies remains incomplete.

**Archana Prasad**

**THE CALL ME MEMBER SAAB: Women in Haryana Panchayati Raj** by Bharti Tekchandani, Kiran Jyoti and Priti Sharma. MARG, Delhi, 1997.

THE reservation of 33% of seats for women in local government (panchayats, zilla parishads, town areas and municipal corporations) has the potential to bring about more far-reaching social change than perhaps any other political measure adopted in recent years. The induction of large numbers of women into the public sphere through the process of nominations and elections, and then into positions of actual political and

social importance will affect the relations between the sexes in ways that are still taking shape but whose significance cannot be over-estimated. The widespread opposition to reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas implies recognition of the danger that this poses to patriarchal forces.

*They Call Me Member Saab* is a study of the elected women members in Karnal district of Haryana by a research organization, MARG. As the introduction clarifies, Haryana was chosen because of its backwardness and the low status of women. The state has the lowest female to male ratio in the country and women constitute only 30.17% of the literate population. Though women in Haryana are very visible and participate in different kinds of economic activity in large numbers and despite the fact that Haryana is economically better off than many parts of the country, the veiled women of the state exist in an unabashedly patriarchal, feudal and sexist world.

The district chosen for the study, Karnal, is a prosperous one. Economic prosperity, however, seems to have little linkage to social progress. The women interviewed in the study constitute 10% of the total women elected in the district. 112 panchs, 14 sarpanchs, 8 panchayat samiti members, 1 panchayat samiti chairperson and 2 zilla parishad members have been interviewed. The caste-wise break-up of those interviewed is as follows:

	FC	SC	OBC
Panchs	55	30	19
Sarpanchs	8	2	3
Panchayat Samiti Members	3	2	3
Panchayat Samiti Chairpersons	1		
Zilla Parishad Members	1		

The study begins with some interesting details as to how various elected women were actually located. The son of one panch pretended not to know anything about her status or whereabouts because he did not want to accept that his mother was a panch; he certainly did not want her to be interviewed.

Except for Krishna Sandhu, the chairperson of the Gharonda panchayat samiti, who was known in her own right, all the other elected women were known as wives or mothers of so-and-so. One sarpanch, Nirmala Devi of Kutel village, was known as sarpanchni while her husband was known as sarpanch. Several women refused to speak in the presence of men, especially their husbands. One of them had a bigamous husband. 67 of them were illiterate while 25 could only sign their names. 14 had studied up to the primary level, 10

between the VU and IX standards, 8 had passed the X standard, 1 was a graduate and 1 a post-graduate.

While the study found that, as in the rest of the state, more SC and OBC women were illiterate, their upper caste counterparts found their status un-enhanced by their education. One SC panch of Gondar village worked as an agricultural labourers on the field for Rs 25 a day while her husband, who earned Rs 50 for the same work, did so when he chose to and spent his earnings in the same manner. Another SC panch of Tikri village was regularly beaten up by her drunken husband.

On the other hand, there were women with unusual stories: one OBC panchayat samiti member told her husband and father-in-law that she would contest the election even if they threw her out of the house because she was determined to campaign for prohibition. Another SC panch filed her nomination papers without informing, let alone asking, anyone at home. Both these women are affiliated to national political parties but affirm that without reservation they would not have got the opportunity to contest the elections. Only 10 elected members had any experience of community work as anganwadi workers and members of mahila mandals before contesting elections.

As far as campaigning was concerned, most of the women candidates went door-to-door during the day. Their men folk were responsible for the campaigning at night, which included providing inducements like liquor to male voters. 18 women were unanimously elected and therefore did not need to campaign. There were 35 women who did not involve themselves with their campaign in any way.

After being elected, a surprisingly large number of women were associated with some form of developmental activity, though sometimes as minimal as signing forms. All of them complained of lack of funds and powers vested in the local bodies to which they had been elected. While some were unaware of the schemes that were to be implemented by them, a few were completely inactive. Significantly, only 8% of the women interviewed felt that they could work independently (of their family members) while 13% needed their husbands' help and 11% the help of others. In 35% of all cases, however, it was the husbands and sons who actually worked. Unfortunately, for 17%, no one did anything.

As for reservation of seats, 84% of the women felt that it was a very positive step. This is an important point to remember whenever the allegation is made that political reservation for women is a demand only raised by elitist urban women. Many of the women

interviewed felt that since men drink and 'steal' money, they were not as trustworthy as women. Several felt that literacy was essential for efficacy. They also felt that women could better implement family planning and prohibition programmes. As many as 101 felt that their families were happy with their being elected and were supportive. Many felt that their status had been enhanced.

Several had given up the *ghunghat* after being elected. Even women who were inactive in the panchayats had become more confident and vocal. One of them said, 'I can say and do what I want.' Another stated that her voice was now heard inside and outside the home. Still another stated that she could sit with the men, even in Karnal. Conversely, one woman complained that her husband had ceased to be supportive. Another's husband said, 'Earlier men could easily control their women, but now women threaten them.'

At the same time, several women complained that panchayat work, added to their domestic duties, was too strenuous a burden. Also too expensive because it entailed travel, eating or at least drinking tea outside the home, and loss of wages. All of them strongly felt the need for remuneration, not only for economic reasons but because it would decrease their dependence on men. One was emphatic that the remuneration should come to her and not to her husband.

They flagged off other problems they faced as elected representatives. While illiteracy topped the list, insecurity outside their homes came a close second. The study did not actually ask questions specifically related to insecurity and the threat of violence. Perhaps some important and disturbing facts about the threat of violence and intimidation that women face as rural women, as women in public life, and as women members of families, would have been revealed.

Official apathy, loss of wages and increased expenses left them feeling demoralized. Many felt that elected male representatives were impolite and ignored them. They felt the need for economic independence and proper allocations of funds. Many were in favour of 50% reservation for women and said that women must unite and make themselves heard. They expressed the need for a separate room where women could discuss among themselves. Some of them even advocated women panchayats. Construction of separate toilets was a strongly felt need. Most wanted *purdah* to be abolished.

At the end of the study a few detailed sketches of some individual elected representatives have been included. One is impressed by the grit and energy of

many of these women, plunging into an unknown world, equipped with nothing more than commonsense and a strong desire for survival.

In conclusion, the authors make some important suggestions that, if implemented, would help make women representatives more effective and the panchayati raj system itself more capable of fulfilling peoples' needs. The suggestions are with regard to the use of the electronic media, both radio and television, for bringing training programmes to the women in their homes. Designing of training programmes with the help of NGOs, and the necessity of making proper arrangements for the women members (like payment of TA/DA, lodging, boarding, transport and so on) so that they can avail of such programmes is emphasized. Literacy programmes and education of girl children are, naturally, strongly recommended. Finally, amendments to the panchayat legislation to ensure devolution of financial powers and elimination of bureaucratization and the functioning of gram sabhas is advocated.

*They Call Me Member Saab* is a timely and, perhaps, pioneering study that provides us an insight into the catapulting of rural women into the public domain. It describes the barriers that women face when they venture out of their limited domestic spheres and makes useful suggestions as to how they can be helped to be effective and autonomous. It is unfortunate and surprising, however, that certain issues, especially pertaining to Haryana, have been missed out by the study.

The first is that in Haryana the 1994 Act contains certain provisions regarding disqualification of a panch, sarpanch and up-sarpanch of a gram panchayat; member, chairman and vice-chairman of a panchayat samiti, and member, president and vice-president of a zilla parishad. Section 175 under chapter XX states that, 'By virtue of provision (q) of this section, none of the above-mentioned persons shall continue as such if they have more than two living children provided that a person having more than two children on or up to the expiry of one year of the commencement of this Act, shall not be deemed to be disqualified.' This legislation has been harshly criticized by the women's movement, and people and organizations interested in strengthening participatory democracy.

This is an anti-poor and anti-woman measure which will ensure that vast numbers of the poor are denied the right to contest elections. It penalizes women for something over which they have little or no control. The study does not concern itself with the impact of this legislation on future elections. No

questions about this legislation were asked to the women, all of whom have more than two children. Does this not indicate that it will be difficult to even find candidates in later elections?

How such laws militate against the rights of women in a male-dominated society was recently illustrated in Haryana when an elected male representative accused his wife of infidelity when she conceived her third child and proceeded to divorce her for this 'crime'.

The second point left untouched by the study concerns the implementation of prohibition in Haryana. While it was the women who created the pressure for promulgation of prohibition, the study tells us nothing about what elected women representatives did to implement it and with what measure of success. Prohibition is an issue of concern and debate in the women's movement and the experience of those responsible for grassroots governance would have been immensely educational.\*

Another weakness of the study is that it makes no attempt to assess how society at large, in a socially backward state with strong patriarchal traditions like Haryana, has reacted to the presence of women in the public domain. Women's reservation is already being subverted in various ways. There are reports from Haryana of no-confidence motions being successfully moved against women sarpanchs so that they can be replaced by male up-sarpanchs. Signature campaigns against women's reservation are being undertaken in villages where the sarpanch's seat has been reserved for a woman, so that this could be changed in the next round of elections.

These processes are, of course, at work in states other than Haryana. Accompanying these processes are shrill campaigns against elected women – of them being proxies, useless, neglecting their domestic duties, falling prey to moral turpitude, creating social chaos and so on. Physical violence against elected women is also on the increase. Lilavati, a corporator in Madurai, was knifed to death by goons running a water racket because she had successfully brought piped drinking water to her ward. Modibai, an adivasi sarpanch of Amba village in district Mandsaur of Madhya Pradesh, was beaten to death by her husband because he did not like her doing panchayat work. There must be similar cases in Haryana but the study does little to illuminate the social milieu that is responsible.

\* Prohibition in Haryana was scrapped on 1 April this year. This was subsequent to the ruling party's electoral debacle, in large part attributed to its prohibition policy.

Despite these shortcomings, the study is more than of academic interest. Women must be made aware of the transformation that legislations like the 73rd Amendment bring in their wake in order to effectively combat the attack on their democratic right to hold elective office. The study reveals that women elected to public office – even if they are illiterate, proxies or ineffective – experience a metamorphosis. The courage to throw off purdah, a ubiquitous part of the Haryana landscape, a woman belonging to a nomadic tribe sitting on a chair in the presence of upper caste men by virtue of her elective office is a courage born of holding elective office. Nuggets of information like these reinforce the significance of women's right to reservation as a right that they must fight to defend and extend.

Subhashini Ali

**CROSSING THE SACRED LINE: Women's Search For Political Power** by Abhilasha Kumari and Sabina Kidwai. Orient Longman, Delhi, 1998.

Prime Minister Vajpayee recently reiterated his personal and party commitment that the constitutional amendment to reserve one-third of the seats to Parliament and state assemblies would be steered through the House on a priority basis. One hopes he remembers that similar assurances were given by his predecessors, H.D. Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral. And that notwithstanding an ostensible all-party consensus on the issue, which incidentally featured in all political manifestos in 1996, the proposed Bill after a few days of acrimonious debate was shelved, to await more propitious times. Evidently this route to a share in political power is a thorny one.

The monograph under review, based on a research project sponsored by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), a German donor agency active in promoting policy oriented work, provides interesting insights into this ongoing struggle for political equality, on the degree of space our political system gives to women to play an active role in the political process. The focus is on the space women have managed to create for themselves in our political parties, and whether there has been any significant change in either the nature of women's functioning or in the parties' approach to women and women's issues. The prognosis is expectedly depressing.

Though the participation of Indian women as voters in our elections has steadily increased over the

years, their representation in state legislatures and national Parliament has never exceeded 8.1 per cent. The number of women candidates put up by different parties or the seats they occupy in key decision-making bodies also remains uniformly low. Abhilasha Kumari and Sabina Kidwai examine the histories, ideologies, manifestos and organizational structures of both national and regional parties to gain insights into the position of women in the political system. More interestingly, they provide in-depth interviews with women politicians who have successfully climbed their way into positions of power.

Their basic contention is that none of the political parties have questioned traditional notions of women's role in society, that women continue to be perceived as belonging to the private or domestic realm whereas political participation is seen as a public domain, consequently for men. Thus, while the necessity of involving women in the political process is never denied, there is little attempt to look at both their capabilities and entitlements. No wonder there is an absence of serious effort to help women, particularly from the more marginalised socio-economic groupings, overcome given barriers.

To those seized with this question, this monograph traverses familiar ground. Ideologically, while the BJP is seen as hostile to this quest, the Congress is characterized as having an ambivalent attitude. The left, however, is viewed more positively. Nevertheless, even they scarcely have a better record. This is explained by the persistence of traditional attitudes. What is inadequately explored is why even women who are in the forefront of the demand for women's reservation, particularly belonging to the left parties, are so coy when discussing either their party positions or leaders. Of course, everyone feels that post the 73rd Amendment the situation is likely to change for the better, now that more women have entered the panchayats.

Overall the argument is that the current situation is created not only by historical and ideological bias but also by the nature of our electoral process and political environment, neither of which facilitate the entry of new groups. Is the route to political power then through the alternative modality of education and jobs, or through changes in property laws? Is the argument that since women do nominally enjoy constitutional equality, the fuss over their representation in political decision-making bodies is somewhat unwarranted? The debate continues.

**Seminarist**

## **ENSLAVED DAUGHTERS: Colonialism, Law and Women's Rights** by Sudhir Chandra. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

'Is it not inhuman that our Hindoo men should have every liberty while women are tied on every hand for ever? If I were to write you about this system of slavery, it would require months to complete it ... Oh! But who has the power to venture and interfere in the customs and notions of such a vast multitude except the government which rules over it? And as long as the government is indifferent to it, I feel sure that India's daughters must not expect to be relieved from their present sufferings.'

Rukhmabai, *The Tribune*, 9 April 1887

ANCIENT civilizations change but slowly. Rulers may come and go, the material facts of life may change, but presuppositions governing public discourse remain durable. So it appears does judicial discourse. We are, after all, an ancient culture.

Well over a 100 years back, a young Hindu woman initiated a legal crusade for freedom from the conjugal claims of a husband she disliked. Earlier, as a child of 11, Rukhmabai was married to Dadajee Bhikajee, a relative of her step-father. Not having reached puberty, she was not sent to her husband's house. The terms of the marriage were unusual. Rukhmabai was well-off, being legal heir to reasonable property from her late father. Her mother had re-married and her step-father had helped contract her marriage. Since the 'husband' was not well-off, nor particularly educated, the understanding was that Dadajee would 'improve' himself and live as a *ghar-jamai*. Over the next few years, while Rukhmabai, though not formally in school, taught herself (including English), the husband became wayward. He shifted to the house of an uncle, indulged in various vices, and made no effort to even acquire an independent source of living.

Since Rukhmabai's dislike of her husband was evident, and she enjoyed the support of her mother, step-father and grandfather—Dadajee approached the courts for the restitution of his conjugal rights. What he stood to gain was not just a wife, but her property.

The court of Justice Pinhey dismissed his appeal. The argument was not just that he found the husband unsuitable, that he was sympathetic to Rukhmabai, or even that he felt that a child-marriage was *per se* invalid, but that since Rukhmabai had never co-habited with Dadajee, the marriage was not quite a marriage. The case, according to him, was for the *institution* not *restitution* of conjugal rights. He further argued that had the appeal been made to the caste authority, given the English policy of not interfering with family law,

the court would have had no *locus standi*. However, since the matter had been brought before him, he would be governed by law and previous judgements. Overall, his verdict was that there was no case for forcing Rukhmabai against her will to live with Dadajee.

The matter went in for appeal. The High Court, in a reversal of the earlier judgement, held both that the marriage was legal and that Hindu law did admit to such cases. Rukhmabai was thus directed to move to her husband's house. She decided to fight back. However, instead of appealing to the Privy Council, she, in a manner of speaking, 'purchased' her freedom from Dadajee for a 'royal' sum of Rs 2,500. Subsequently, Dadajee died. Rukhmabai went to England, became a doctor, and came back to practice in Surat. She never remarried and lived the life of a widow.

The case and the controversy became a *cause celebre*, and many people – social reformers, conservatives, liberals – became embroiled in the debate through media and associated public forums. There were many issues at stake – the validity of child marriage, what constituted a valid marriage, the incompatibility of the 'couple', the fact that Dadajee was seen as a wastrel, issues of property, family and caste politics, and above all – the freedom and inviolability of the individual.

On the surface, even in the more constrained environment of colonial India, public sympathy should have been with Rukhmabai. After all, she was hardly consulted for the marriage, so how could she be expected to co-habit with Dadajee. But she was a Hindu woman. Would upholding her cause not damage the community? Who were the British to impose their cultural and legal standards on the community? Would this not bring into disrepute the very institutions of marriage and family? Over-riding all these was the apprehension, implicit in the later judgements, about the freedom of women.

These debates, too rich to be presented in a short response, are equally alive today. The 1900s saw two cases concerning the restitution of conjugal rights. Interestingly, while the Andhra High Court judgement upheld the rights of the wife, the Delhi High Court took a contrary view. And our Supreme Court, not particularly regarded for its emancipatory attitude towards women, upheld the Delhi High Court judgement. As earlier, at stake were the institutions of marriage and the family. Clearly, structures receive precedence over the individual.

There are at least two other side issues which mark this case. What if the Rukhmabai-Dadajee con-

flict had been reversed? Would Dadajee have received the same degree of support from the liberal reformers had he tried to wriggle out of a bad marriage on grounds that he was, at the time of contract, a minor and that he found his wife unsuitable on grounds of education, temperament or property? The fact that men, in those times, could contract more than one marriage, or engage publicly in extra-marital liaisons, while the women had no such choice (legal or social) and could not, in most cases, even marry on widowhood, does not obviate this question.

Some years back a friend who had been married off as a child faced such a predicament. While his 'wife' stayed behind in the village, he went on to higher studies. At some stage, he met a woman whom he wanted to live with. He was then informed that he was already married. The fact that he was then a child, had never co-habited with his 'wife', did not even know her – hardly mattered. He was, as per his family and community, married. The girl had shifted to his parents house. She considered herself 'married' to him. Was he not being selfish? Was he not ruining the other woman's life? What was she to do? Was she to blame? It was even suggested that he could 'keep' both women.

All of the above is familiar. The friend was made to feel guilty. He finally had to truncate his relations with his family/community. Also give up his property, never to go back to his native place. He did all that. Yet, the accusations continued.

A second issue has to do with Rukhmabai's subsequent career. How could a woman who had been instrumental in raising substantive issues of principle, taken up a public fight, solicited help, become a mascot for all those fighting for social reform and the cause of women – 'strike a deal', 'buy' her freedom, and 'play' at wife and widow. Many 'understood' the social compulsions, particularly in 19th century India. Or the fact that continuing rebellion would have come in the way of her practicing medicine. Did not the other great social reformer Pandita Ramabai, even after conversion to Christianity, retain her widow's garb?

Sudhir Chandra could have done well to explore this tension between an icon and his/her constituency. All too often, those of us, who engage in public causes, refuse due cognizance to our subjects. We expect them to 'perform' in consonance with the needs of our causes. The more recent debates over Shah Bano are a case in point. As is the case of Ameena, the child bride rescued from a 'marriage' with a Saudi national.

Finally, the issue of how we write about such 'cases'. Not imposing our personal value judgements



over history demands discipline. It goes to the credit of Sudhir Chandra that he has not just gifted us an extremely riveting and compelling monograph, but that he has made clear his 'feminist' biases. For once, the discourse and the interlocutor can be easily demarcated. And this requires some skill and sensitivity.

Harsh Sethi

**COLONIALISM AND ITS FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE: The British in India** by Bernard S. Cohn.  
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

IN *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Cohn provides readers insights into the ways in which colonial power was deployed. The key to the control of the complex and stratified Indian society was knowledge that was laboriously collected by the colonial state. It came packaged in published reports, statistical returns (finance, education, health, mortality rates, prisons), official proceedings, legal codes, administrative histories, annual reports, district gazetteers, scientific journals, travelogues—the variety could be infinite, but this diverse production of knowledge was funnelled into the sole project of ruling India. The interpretation of this huge body of official and semi-official documentation, requiring exegetical and hermeneutical skills Cohn calls investigative modalities.

Of investigative modalities, the most important place was occupied by historiography, as it was the 'the most complex, pervasive and powerful, underlying a number of the other more specific modalities' (p. 5). Historiography formed the core of any reorganization of the traditional systems of knowledge—medicine, law codes (both Hindu and Muslim), property rights, traditional forms of land holding—according to the systemic ordering of the forms of knowing and thinking which the British brought with them to India. Accounts of travel, another modality for interpreting a strange world of customs and practices and people, used the observational powers of the eye and the pen, while spatial mapping, geographical as well as social features, of the huge administrative divisions yielded a mammoth body of data. These data, stashed away in the filing system that was the colonial administration, attempted to render the country they were ruling transparent.

What Cohn demonstrates successfully through these essays is that the filing systems are themselves codes. He contends that these texts, whether penetrating into the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar or law, or enumerating the physical features of the different

'races' and regions, all attempted to capture and represent the variety of 'others' that were present in the amorphous Indian society, and should therefore be read not just for the 'facts' or 'indications' they revealed, but also for the underlying meanings flowing from very different European rationalistic principals and assumptions. The essay entitled 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command' brings out the multiple layers of signification that underscored the delineation and reconstitution of systematic grammars for Sanskrit and vernacular languages, together with a whole range of teaching aids developed in institutions—Fort William in Calcutta, Fort St. George in Madras and Haileybury in England—for the future civil servants of the Company. In the process, Cohn argues, even Indian grammar could be converted from an Indian form of knowledge into a European object that was lexically knowable and quantifiable in the idiom of European rationality. The close link between knowledge and power was rendered more obvious, with some European missionaries bypassing classical linguistic training in Persian and Sanskrit altogether, and concentrating instead on the vernacular languages of Bengali and Hindustani, felt to be better harnessed to the simple structures of command on which colonial rule was to be based.

The same unequal power relations prevailed between the Indian scholars and their British counterparts. They were embedded in something more than just the dominant social and political positions occupied by the British. There was a major epistemological gulf between the two cultures and many British scholars complained bitterly about the manner in which the Indian scholars worked and thought. Given their dominant position, acquired because of their political status, the British could easily set the agenda on the way Indian languages, both classical and vernacular, were to be encoded and transmitted to the future ruling groups. Memorization without any proper understanding of the meanings of the texts was reflective of the attempts of Indian scholars, and was responsible for the rather ineffectual development of legal and critical subtleties, felt many prominent European Orientalists of the time.

Only Ellis among the early Orientalists appreciated the radically different mode of knowing and thinking of the Indian scholars and their systems of knowledge which the British assumed to be flawed because they had adjudged the Indian forms for the transmission of knowledge from the perspective of European norms (pp.52-53). But Ellis was only one

among many. By the late 19th century the European understanding and encoding of the Indian languages, from being fluid, complex, even unstructured, had become fixed, objective and tangible – it had made inroads into Indian legal texts, made assumptions about the medical treatises, and had worked its way into giving Indian civilization a history – in other words, it had succeeded in rendering India as a “case” of an earlier civilization, or a museum of ancient practices, from which earlier stages of universal world history could be recovered’ (p. 54). The Indian systems of knowledge – especially languages, were represented comparatively, a methodology that had the advantage of allowing the comparison of the formal features along lexical, syntactic, morphologic and phonetic groupings. Cohn stresses this particular achievement for the comparative method had the power to enable the ‘practitioner to classify, bound, and control variety and difference’ (p. 55). Moreover, the comparative method ‘also implied linear directionality: things, ideas, institutions could be seen as progressing through stages to some end or goal. It could also be used to establish regression, decay and decadence, the movement through time away from some pristine, authentic, original starting point, a golden age in the past’ (p. 55).

With the mastery over language, a project that in one move encompassed unique command over the ‘other’ for then the ‘other’ could be endowed with historiography, racial characteristics, and an European-controlled transformation of their own traditions and modes of thought, the road was clear for a more discursive intervention in the indigenous social structure and value system or the cultural site of law. The indigenous traditions of dominance and subordination, as reflected in the local institutions and procedures of dispute settlement, collided with the political culture of colonialism that was articulated at several levels: the state, the judicial apparatus and legal processes and the supra-local laws and regulations. The result was a conflict of values, where the hegemonic colonial rule of law inevitably had to be the victor. But it was an empty victory, for the substitution of English procedural law had the obverse effect of a paradox – the paradox that law, intended to serve as a basic defining principle of colonial rule, became itself an instrument of misunderstanding about the very nature of that dominance. This paradox ironically perpetuated a mutual miscognition that reproduced the distortions of the ruler’s knowledge of the ruled, and vice versa, in a discourse without end.

In the essay, ‘Law and the Colonial State’, Cohn recognizes and emphasizes that the colonizer’s know-

ledge of the colonized was not and never could be neutral to the relation of dominance and subordination which bound them together. This was more than apparent in the manner in which a Colebrooke or a Jones made certain assumptions about the ancient legal texts, the Dharmashastras and Mimamsa that formed the core of the constitution of ancient India, and set out the law of the land. From such assumptions, with the Orientalists, Warren Hastings and Sir William Jones convinced about the existence of the ‘ancient Indian constitution’, it was but a short step to end up ‘with what they had so much wanted to avoid – with English law as the law of India’ (p. 75).

The next two essays expand the meaning of the term ‘social’ to imply both social and cultural phenomena: Culture is transformed into the common frontier of anthropology and history, and the centrality of culture as an analytical tool for the examination of the attitudes of both the ruler and the ruled is acknowledged. In the ‘Transformation of Objects’, Cohn explores ‘how things are fabricated and how they are transformed into objects that have value and meaning.’ Yet the dominant political and social power established the norms of this cultural transaction. Therefore, it was the British who, in the 19th century, defined in an authoritative and effective fashion how the value and meaning of the objects produced or found in India was determined. Archaeological sites, artifacts, buildings, pottery, textiles – European science decided their worth after measuring it against the aesthetics and scientific expertise of the West.

‘Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism’, explores the semantics of clothing, the manner in which even clothing and drapery could represent power and authority for the rulers or the lack of it for the ruled. Even sartorial accessories like swords and turbans assumed an enormous significance, as they were invested with specific meanings by the giver and the receiver, and graded on the grid of power as the person giving or bestowing favours and the recipient. In fascinating analytical reconstructions of the cultural constructs of power, Cohn shows how clothes became invested with moral attitudes and a way of life – both British and Indian. Of special interest is the manner in which Cohn slips into the indigenous masculine mind-set of the 19th century and of the refashioning of masculine garments signaling to the well-versed that the wearer belonged to the progressive sections of Indian society. The way in which Victorian notions on feminine morality, with the required impetus being provided by the missionaries who professed to be horrified by the scanty feminine

attire prevalent in even good Indian families, was incorporated into the clothing of the women from well-to-do Indian families, with the encouragement of their westernized male members, provides an acute analysis of social and cultural transformations effected by the civilizational confrontations that released forces of change even within the domestic arena that long remained outside any direct onslaught of colonial values. Cohn has even touched on the surprising twists issues of apparel received when they were turned into symbols of protest – the most famous example being the Gandhi cap. Colonialism, nationalism, and even missionary zeal were thus deeply implicated in representational strategies and politics.

Cohn has succeeded in laying bare the unconscious foundations of the colonial rule in India through an innovative mixture of anthropology and history. He has caught the play between the old and the new in time and space in an exciting interpretation of history and anthropology. It would be constructive to apply his methodology to the endless permutations and combinations the stratified indigenous society underwent in order to neutralize some of the effects of this civilizational confrontation between the forces of colonization and the colonized.

**Anandita Mukhopadhyay**

**MAJOR GENERAL A.A. RUDRA: His Service in Three Armies and Two World Wars** by Major General D.K. Palit. Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997.

Major General Ajit Anil Rudra was verily a Zelig. Remember Woody Allen's enchanting little film by that name? The hero – a mousy, cipher of a man has the luck or the knack of finding himself in historic situations standing next to, or peering over the shoulders of, high personages. He is thus featured in innumerable press photographs and in newsreels alongside famous people who are doing famous things until, pretty soon, Zelig becomes famous himself, presumably, for being seen in the right company! Allen's film is a farce about celebrity-mongering by the mass-media.

'Jick' Rudra (who died at 97 years of age in 1995) was no mouse and was far from being a wallflower. Nevertheless, his long, pioneering but fairly undistinguished military career (mostly staff postings and, other than in the trenches on the Somme in the First World War as an ordinary trooper in a battalion of the Middlesex infantry regiment, with little operational

experience!) was, it seems, continuously punctuated by Zelig-like run-ins with the rich, the royalty and the renowned. For instance, during his years in England he recounts getting close to the family of T.E. Lawrence, yup, the very same Lawrence of Arabia. Elsewhere, he recalls accidentally dropping his swagger stick at the Lahore race course only to have the then Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) in company of his cousin, Dickie Mountbatten as his ADC, on a state visit, pick it up and restore it with a smile to its owner. Some 15 years later, Rudra had a ringside seat at the coronation of George VI.

His memoirs (narrated with panache to, and written up elegantly by, Major General 'Monty' Palit) are an engaging chronicle of the military milieu and manners in 20th century 'cantonment India'. They also reveal the truth behind some singular political incidents involving the army, and are a delightful aid to flesh out characters who feature in our history books.

It turns out that Rudra's home in Delhi was a seed-bed of the freedom movement. His father, a progressive educationist and Principal of St Stephen's College, was instrumental in persuading the man later anointed the Mahatma to return from South Africa. As a young man, the General reports of his regularly bumping into the likes of C.F. Andrews, the Anglican missionary, Gokhale and, of course, M.K. Gandhi; of his keeping up a loose and easy relationship with the last-named long after he (Rudra) had joined the British Indian Army, and of his risking an abrupt end to his Service career by clandestinely facilitating the Mahatma's albeit more innocuous freedom movement-related escapades.

But, more importantly, he also elicits from Gandhi, with whom he is on bantering terms, the latter's prudent view that a free India will need an army. This is significant considering the sheer nonsense that was propagated about Gandhian non-violence animating state policy, chiefly by the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru, according to Rudra, told a bewildered C-in-C, India, General Robert Lockhart, soon after Independence that the country, because it believed in *ahimsa*, needed no defence policy and would do without an army! Rudra at the time on the General Staff was Lockhart's right hand man and close to Field Marshal Auckinleck, the Supreme Commander of the Indian and Pakistani Forces. The 'Auk' advised Defence Minister Baldev Singh to use Rudra, the senior-most Indian officer after Cariappa, who was away at the time attending a course at the Imperial Defence College in London, as his personal adviser.

'Jick' Rudra betook himself to Cambridge in 1914, with nothing more exalted in mind than to play cricket for the university; the access to Cambridge made possible, as he relates, because of his family's Anglican Church connections. With service in the First World War drawing most of the young on the campus by the River Cam, he too followed suit and joined the war effort a year later. His regiment was shipped off to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force under Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. Rudra was invalided out after a time in the trenches but, unlike his Cambridge mates, was denied an officer's commission in the British Army that he sought later in the War. But his ranker service won him official gratitude, including a meeting in Whitehall with the Secretary of State for India, and a King's Commission – via Daly College, Indore, because Sandhurst had stopped operating in the immediate post-War years for reasons of economy – in the British Indian Army.

Rudra was commissioned into the 4/15 Punjab and was one of only two officers (the other being Lt. Gen. Rajendrasinhji, the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar, of the 2nd Lancers, winner of a Military Cross in the Western Desert) permitted to remain in a British-officered regiment after the Indianization programme got underway in the mid to late twenties. The rest of the Sandhurst crowd, including Cariappa, Ayub Khan, et al., after their year's attachment as subalterns in British units, were either pushed off to the regiments earmarked for Indianization or transferred to State Forces. None were ever given any responsible positions either at the regimental level or on the General Staff. It was only late in the Burma campaign that K.S. Thimayya, S.P.P. Thorat and L.P. Sen – the only Indians to do so in the Second World War – enjoyed command in battle of their respective 'Indianized' units. Rudra, during the War, served in the Military Intelligence Directorate and as Director, Public Relations.

Obviously, Rudra socialized well with the English officers and, within limits, was accepted by them. In any case, it led, among other things, to his being called before the Alfred Skeen Committee. Motilal Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah were members and they pushed for a faster-paced Indianization of the army. Particularly memorable is Rudra's recollection of how a waspish Jinnah took apart an English Colonel's testimony before the committee to the effect that Indians were incapable of command and could be trusted with neither handling monies nor with being fair and dispassionate in matters of recruitment and promotions.

Indeed, Rudra offers telling insights into the British Army officers' mentality and how determined and ingenious they were in their attempts to derail the Indianization programme. One of the preferred means to do that, as Rudra tells it, was to recommend proven incompetents from among the Viceroy's Commissioned Officers – the army's NCOs – for officer training with the express purpose of bringing this scheme into disrepute. Of course, there were honourable exceptions, persons like Auckinleck and Field Marshal, the Viscount Slim, stalwart British Indian Army-men, who meant well by the Indians and did not hesitate to reward merit.

Rudra's special relationship with the British also led to his being trusted with some sensitive jobs. Thus, it was he who inquired into that incident in the 1930s involving the 2/18 Royal Garhwal Regiment which refused to fire on the Khudai Khidmatgars protesting nonviolently in Peshawar. It earned this battalion undeserved praise from freedom fighters. The truth, as Rudra discovered, was that the Garhwalis were not fed that morning and the unit's British officers, after ordering these troops to take up position in the Kissakawhnee area of the city, cantered off to their mess to partake of breakfast and rest! Without their officers, these tired and hungry hillsmen, who just the night before had got back to the barracks from another call-up 'in aid to the civil power', refused to fire when they were ordered to do so. But for this lapse in officering, a second Jallianwala Bagh would have occurred, with what consequences who can say? (There is a cautionary tale here somewhere for the present day Indian Army stretched to the nines in performing 'internal security' duties.) Rudra's report prevented the entire regiment from being dishonoured and, as punishment, disbanded. And during the Second Great War, his fluency in Punjabi resulted in his debriefing Sikh and Punjabi Muslim soldiers who had gone over to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army.

General Rudra seems to have been adept at simultaneously playing both ends of the game, especially in the twilight years of the Raj. By his own account, he advised 'the Auk' in the matter of prosecuting the INA stalwarts – G.K. Sehgal, Shah Nawaz Khan and G.S. Dhillon – and, at the time of the showcase trials in the Red Fort, persuaded the Congress Party lawyer Bhulabhai Desai to defend the accused by supplying a piece of exonerating evidence – the Singapore garrison commander Lt. General Percival's signed statement to his surrendering Indian troops freeing them.

from their oath to the British and advising them to, in effect, cut their separate deals with the conquering Japanese! Again, at the time of deciding on the future of the Gurkha regiments in 1947, Rudra is appointed to the team visiting Kathmandu. He is ordered by his British superiors to keep mum during the proceedings. But prior to his trip, he makes an end-run around the British injunction by securing permission from Baldev Singh to canvas with the Nepalese government for continued service of Nepali Gurkhas in the Indian Army. To the consternation of his British colleagues, Rudra makes a powerful pitch at the meeting, which is accepted by the Ranas then running that country.

Ironically, it is Rudra's regimental sentiments which wrote *finis* to his career. He is asked by Lockhart to take over as GOC-in-C of the Army's Southern Command and to prepare a plan of action against the Nizam's forces in Hyderabad. The man he is to replace in Poona, Eric Goddard, Rudra's former CO from his old regiment, requests a delay of a few weeks to hand over command, pleading that this extra time in office would earn him a higher pension. Rudra accedes to this request. In the mean time, Lockhart resigns (when asked by Nehru whether he had prior information of the Pathan raiders gathering for an attack on Kashmir; he did), the 'intriguer' (according to the memoirist) Roy Bucher succeeds as C-in-C, and apprehending Rudra as Lockhart's man, promptly sidelines him by posting him as GOC, Madras Area. End of Rudra's career in the third army he served.

All this is great reading, but one cannot help but discern a moral hollow at the centre of 'Jick' Rudra's life, a hollow, which to be honest, must have been in the soul of every King's Commissioned Indian Officer, every Viceroy's Commissioned Officer and every Gentleman-Cadet who passed out of the Royal Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, in the early years. His account is replete with instances of routine discrimination against Indian officers motivated by the rank racism of their British counterparts and of the army establishment, generally. It is also full of admiring references to the few Indians who had the gumption to stand up to British taunts and insults. He makes special mention, for example, of one Ponnappa, a bold and no-nonsense Coorg classmate of his from Indore, who countered an insult by a senior British officer with public insult, and paid the price of virtually being drummed out of service. The issue here is the extent to which Rudra compromised his self-respect for the sake of a career. A Ponnappa reached the point

of resistance very early – at the officer training stage itself. Rudra (and the rest of that lot) never did.

**Bharat Karnad**

**PEOPLE'S RIGHTS: Social Movements and the State in the Third World** edited by Manoranjan Mohanty, Partha Nath Mukherji and Olle Tornquist. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

THE idea of compiling this volume emerged when some scholars from Asia and Africa and a few Third World specialists from Europe met at an international workshop on Social Movements, State and Democracy in the Third World in October 1992 in New Delhi, as part of the P.C. Mahalanobis Birth Centenary Celebrations. The participants found the workshop so rewarding that they decided to continue their collaboration through future projects, and this collection of essays has been published as the first major outcome of that process. Hence, in an integral way, it is a purposeful and collective effort. As Manoranjan Mohanty writes in an introductory note, 'This volume has been planned as an intervention in the growing debate on the role of the state and civil society in the processes of transformation in the contemporary world. Challenging the dominant political theory of capitalist globalisation, the authors reaffirm some of the primary values of anti-colonial struggle and articulate the issues raised by contemporary social movements in the Third World as democratic assertions of people's rights.'

In a cumulative assertion, all the essays locate the issue of human rights within the popular struggles in the Third World against class exploitation and social oppression, thus moving away from the individualist notion of rights in the tradition of western liberalism. The social process that seeks to democratise the post-colonial state to make it more responsive and participatory in much of South and Southeast Asia and in Africa is highlighted. There is an attempt to emphasise the significance of the issues relating to caste, ethnic identity, gender and culture, as well as to integrate them with the class movements of workers and peasants. The three main currents of people's struggles for post-colonial transformation, revolt against class exploitation, and social movements (women's, anti-caste, environmental, and human rights) are concurrently explored to enlarge the meanings of freedom and rights. The thematic focus in most of the essays lies in recognising the state as a coercive apparatus which acts on the side of the ruling elites, while the oppressed

struggle in the ambit of civil society to pressurise the state to meet their aspirations. Both coercion and aspiration are born out of the nature of the development process that the state has followed in the post-colonial era.

This does not mean that all the authors agree on all aspects. There are differences between them which emerge in the text although, perhaps because of the manner in which the text itself has been planned, the discussion on these differences is not laid out. This is something of a disappointment, because in the 1992 workshop some of these issues must have been discussed and one misses the potential creativity of dissent and debate. Thus, in the first section on Civil Society, State and Nation, while Neera Chandhoke emphasises the integrating principle based on democracy, Mahmood Mamdani considers that the received theory of democracy itself is irrelevant to the African reality. In another incipient debate, Manoranjan Mohanty considers social movements to be a reflection of the 'creative society' denied by capitalism, while Sucha Singh Gill shows that some ethnic movements in India have been instruments for the reversal of democratisation. There is also the tension between perspectives on the state. Parth Nath Mukherjee and Ishtiaq Ahmed clearly delineate the role of the state in mediating between sections of the bourgeoisie and suppressing resistance in civil society, while Bjorn Beckman argues that the state plays a central role in the creation of civil society.

In the second section on people's movements, elements of the debate on the social movements come out fairly sharply. Gail Omvedt argues her position that the peasant movement (particularly in Maharashtra) has many radical features, specially of linking up with gender, caste, and environmental issues, with the possibility of unfolding a 'new agrarian revolution'. But Staffan Lindberg shows that there is a wide variation in the peasantry and different units of the same organisation may take contradictory positions on issues of culture and oppression. Abdul Rauf Mustapha, in his essay on Nigeria, demonstrates that the peasantry has been unable to develop a democratic response because peasant politics is a function of social structure and a reflection of cultural and historical values. Nripen Bandyopadhyaya, on the other hand, focuses on land reforms to argue that the mobilisation and participation of the peasantry is possible for shaping its own destiny (while acknowledging that the West Bengal reforms are showing signs of exhaustion). Olle Tornquist takes a different tack on the question of democratisation in the Philippines to show that even

when radical left groups entered the process to create conditions more favourable, they lost the initiative to non-archival organisations. But Sharit analysis of trade unions in India, existing organisations are not able to meet democratic aspirations, new forms do need – although the emergence of the new forms may weaken the overall movement.

The last section on human rights is edited by scholars and activists who have been in the struggle for rights in the context of a global dynamic. While they all eventually converge on the necessity for the human rights' movement to have a social base and respond to all manifestations of oppression, there are, nevertheless, no clear clues to what the debate could lead to. Upendra Baxi considers that the Indian state has retained its autonomy and is capable of responding to intransigent behaviour' to suppress the oppressed, but G. Haragopal and K. Srinivasan demonstrate that continuous amendments of the law itself has reduced the effectiveness of the law and paved the way to authoritarianism. Olukoshi shows that, in Nigeria, the rights movement among the middle class has had little effect, a response to the massively increased the structural adjustment programme of the International Monetary Fund-Worship. At the same time, there is little convergence among the civil liberties organisations. In the way of a larger all-inclusive way, Arief Budiman indicates the presence in Indonesia, where the legitimises military rule among the middle class through economic development and forms of dissent, and intense social movements in the democratic struggle. In a concluding section, Sethi analyses the manner in which NGOs, and social movements emerge in the social spaces created by the decline of developmental and political processes. Frequently, these were absorbed into the state apparatus, isolated as the social base dwindled. That one must not lose sight of the importance of this activity that provides the basis for analysis, it is this activity that provides the basis for analysis.

It is this 'hope' that animates the movement. As the Introduction spells out, 'A rights rooted in the post-colonial context, perceived as a set of conditions which affect all, groups, communities and nations'.

focus of the capitalist epoch on dual... presented an exclusivist rights. The social movements in it the perspective of defining text of manifest and latent deep-long-term denial of rights and of constantly grasping new nation and seeking new possibilities trouble is that hoping about the post-modernism is not adequate for an 'interventionally postulate that the rights' build alliances and expand its social and ignore the reality which is being the professionals are being coopted, and, the state is retreating, and heterological incompatibility stands in the . The essays, therefore, largely fail to find Estic solutions to the problem that illustrate.

ough, the essays succeed in an area to have been the original objective of the works. This is in an exposition of the modern state. Implicit in the various recognition that the post-colonial state falls very much into the classical the 'managing committee of the rule-revealing is the manner in which this committee has creatively devised new session, subversion, and cooption to that of global capitalist exploitation. arena of legislation or culture, of ethical-material development, of political rights, of labour organisations or of gender sensitivity or peasant on of essays tirelessly explains how the World continuously intervenes to the dissatisfaction within civil to step in with violent repression. attention is in anticipation of dissent to learn from the global experience of the state had been coupled to an function of the capitalist system – on and appropriation of surplus – could indeed have been a valuable ing lists of both analysts and practitioners can certainly 'hope' about the freedom' in future volumes – which is promised in this one.

**Danu Roy**

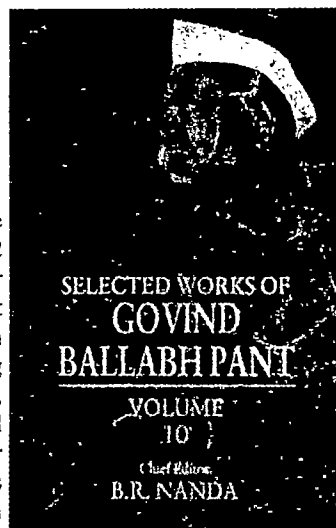
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# Communications

*Seminar* (464) on the 'Right to Education' carried a number of contributions on the proposed Constitution (83rd Amendment) Bill. However, it would have been useful to reproduce the Bill itself. Had you done so, not just your readers but also those supporting the proposed constitutional amendment would have realized that it substantially departs from the thrust of the Supreme Court judgement of 1993. Some of the serious flaws in the Bill are:

A. Though paragraph 1 of the Statement of Objects and Reasons attached to the Bill refers to the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Supreme Court's judgement of 1993, para 2 drastically changes the scope and target of the responsibilities of the state – only on the basis of the recommendation of the Committee of Education Ministers. The lack of subtlety displayed by those who drafted the Bill is indicative of the opinion they have of the understanding of Indian citizens and Members of Parliament. No one is expected to notice the difference between a *fundamental right of all children up to the age of 14*, and that between 6-14. Nor are we expected to object to the shifting of responsibility from the state to the parents as a 'fundamental duty'; the state's responsibility 'to provide' is changed to one of 'enforcement'.

It is assumed that none of us is regarding compulsory, free elementary education enacted by most states remain unenforced because of the absence of adequate schools, support services, *without which poor families are incapable of sending their children, especially girls, to school.*

B. Studies on the last aspect enabled the women's movement to demand a national programme for child-care services (as recommended in the NPE, 1975). This was done through various campaigns during the '70s and '80s – culminating in the acknowledgment of the necessity of *child care and education*, especially for children below the poverty line, in the NPE 1993. A decade later, the only hope for a national policy for child-care is provided by the new Bill – an otherwise most objectionable policy – designed to erode India's democratic values.

The proposed constitutional amendment relieves the state of all responsibility for child-care from birth to the age of six. This is a departure from the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 (resolution moved by India) and reaffirmed in 1991.



C. The Rights of the Girl Child to special support was first adopted at a SAARC summit, leading to National Plans of Action and the recognition of the present decade ('90s) as the International Decade of the Girl Child. Women's organisations and researchers who undertook to consult girls (from poverty groups) on their needs invariably came up with a demand for child-care centres, relief from excessive workload, on sibling care and other responsibilities for the family's survival—so that they could go to school and not to non-formal education (NFE) centres. There is no dearth of studies to demonstrate the positive impact of any form of child-care service on enrolment of girls in school.

The women's movement has been demanding child-care and development services, both as a 'birth-right of all children' and as an 'essential' support for (a) children's rights to development, and (b) working parents.

D. The Directive Principles of State Policy are defined by the Constitution as 'fundamental principles of governance'. Sometime in the '80s, the Supreme Court ruled that while government may take time to translate these principles into legislation, it would be *unconstitutional* to legislate against 'the spirit of the Directive Principles'.

I hope readers will interpret clause 4 of the proposed Amendment—that 'Article 45 of the Constitution shall be omitted'—in all its (lack of) subtlety. There have been laws in the past based on the Directive Principles (e.g. the Equal Remunerations Act 1976)—but no demand to delete any Directive Principle Bill.

E. This Bill is one of several measures on the anvil to reduce the Supreme Court's role as a guardian of the Constitution and people's rights. A shape of things to come? Or a symbolic celebration of the 50th anniversary of independence?

Lastly, the total withdrawal of all state responsibility (regulatory and otherwise) with regard to private schools, will certainly satisfy the theologians of the free market by providing constitutional guarantee to institutionalised inequality in education, and deprive students, teachers and parents of any protection against exploitation and abuse. Significantly, the guarantee is being offered during a year of parent's protests against unjustifiable fee-hikes and tragic negligence of student's security and care by private schools.

**Vina Mazumdar**

Centre for Women's Development Studies  
Delhi

## **The Constitution (83rd Amendment) Bill, 1997**

*A Bill further to amend the Constitution of India*

Be it enacted by Parliament in the forty-eighth year of the of the Republic of India as follows:

1. (1) This Act may be called the Constitution (Eighty-third Amendment) Act, 1997.  
(2) It shall come into force on such date as the central government may, by notification in the official Gazette, appoint.
2. After article 21 of the Constitution, the following article shall be inserted, namely:  
'21 A. (1) The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all citizens of the age of six to fourteen years.  
(2) The right to free and compulsory education referred to in clause (1) shall be enforced in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.  
(3) The State shall not make any law, for free and compulsory education under clause (2), in relation to the educational institutions not maintained by the State or not receiving aid out of State funds.'
3. Article 35 of the Constitution shall be renumbered as clause (1) of that article and after clause (1) as so renumbered and before the *Explanation*, the following clause shall be inserted namely:  
'(2) The competent legislature shall make the law for the enforcement of right to free and compulsory education referred to in clause (1) of article 21 A within one year from the commencement of the Constitution (Eighty-third Amendment) Act, 1997: Provided that a provision of any law relating to free and compulsory education in force in a State immediately before the commencement of the Constitution (Eighty-third Amendment) Act, 1997 which is inconsistent with the provisions of article 21 A, shall continue to be in force until amended or repealed by a competent legislature or other competent authority or until the expiration of one year from such commencement, whichever is earlier.'
4. Article 45 of the Constitution shall be omitted.
5. In article 51 A of the Constitution, after clause (j); the following clause shall be added namely:  
'(k) to provide opportunities for education to a child between the age of six and fourteen years of whom such citizen is a parent or guardian.'

## *Statement of Objects and Reasons*

1. The founding fathers of our Constitution made a provision imposing an obligation, under article 45 in

Part IV relating to the Directive Principles of State Policy, upon the State to endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, for free and compulsory education for children up to fourteen years of age. However, this goal has proved elusive so far. Our inability to achieve this goal 37 years after the target period has been a cause for serious concern. Reiterating the constitutional directive, the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, as modified in 1992, states that free and compulsory elementary education of satisfactory quality shall be provided to all children up to the age of fourteen years before we enter the 21st century. The Supreme Court in its judgement in *Unni Krishnan J.P. vs. State of Andhra Pradesh*, A.I.R. 1993 S.C. 2178, has held that children of this country have a fundamental right to free education until they complete the age of fourteen years. The Common Minimum Programme of the United Front Government, resolves to make right to free and compulsory elementary education a fundamental right and to enforce it through suitable statutory measures.

2. The Committee of Education Ministers which was set up to examine the implications of the aforesaid resolution have recommended that the Constitution be amended to make the Right to Free and Compulsory Education from six to fourteen years of age as a fundamental right and to make a fundamental duty of parents to provide opportunities for education to their children of this age group. Consequent thereupon, provision in the nature of compulsory and free education as a Directive Principles of State Policy under article 45 is no more required. States and Union territories would be required to enact laws for the enforcement of free and compulsory education within one year from the commencement of the Constitution (Eighty-third Amendment) Act, 1997.

3. The amendment of the Constitution to provide for compulsory education of children as a fundamental right would demonstrate the necessary political will and administrative resolve of the country to achieve Universalisation of elementary education and to eradicate illiteracy. This historical amendment of the Constitution in the 50th year of our independence should inspire the Nation to meet the daunting challenge of achieving the goal of education for all by 2000 AD.

4. The Bill seeks to achieve the above objects.

New Delhi, The 9th July 1997

Power Play

### *Financial Memorandum*

1. Clause 2 of the Bill seeks to insert a new article 21A in the Constitution of India to provide that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all citizens of the age of six to fourteen years.

2. The estimated financial expenditure to implement the aforesaid obligation is forty thousand crore rupees during the next five years. The estimated annual expenditure will be eight thousand crore rupees. The said expenditure shall be shared by the Union and the State on the basis of sharing arrangements to be determined by a group of experts constituted for the purpose by the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

3. No other recurring or non-recurring expenditure is likely to be involved.

### *Annexure*

Extracts from the Constitution of India

45. The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

### *Part IVA*

#### *Fundamental Duties*

51A. It shall be the duty to every citizen of India—

\*

LIMPERT'S 'People Without a Country' (*Seminar* 463) is no different from most studies carried out by human rights activists on similar problems in the sense that they invariably suffer from a partisan outlook. Limpert's concern for stateless peoples as vulnerable sections and their consequent subjection to human rights abuses is well-taken and beyond dispute. However, in the context of Arunachal Pradesh, Limpert chooses to be highly selective on the question of human rights by highlighting only one side of the story, i.e. the human rights concerns of the Chakmas and Hajongs. As a result, he fails to take up the indigenous question in his analyses of the refugee imbroglio in Arunachal Pradesh without which one cannot appreciate the nature of the current problem.

Indigenous peoples the world over have long been recognized as marginalized groups on account of their subjection to varied processes of exploitation, discrimination and alienation. 'The Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations' under the aegis of the UN Economic and Social Council (1986)

observed that: 'Pluralism, self-management, self-government, autonomy and self-determination within a policy of ethnic development, as defined by San Jose Declaration, appear to be the formula called for by the times in which we are now living and to do justice to the aspirations and desires of indigenous populations, which have for long been subjected to interference and imposed conditions of all kinds.'

Any attempt at analyzing the Chakma question must, therefore, situate the problem in a framework larger than the one suggested by Limpert where he focuses exclusively on the background of Chakma's flight from erstwhile East Pakistan, their settlement in Arunachal Pradesh and their so-called integration with the social fabric of Arunachal Pradesh. Further, Limpert's assertion that 'Chakmas and Hajongs have voted in state elections and paid state taxes on their land' is not only facile but also unfounded in the absence of any empirical evidence. Such contentions are only reflective of his unawareness of an ongoing movement in the state against the settlement of the Chakmas and Hajongs since the early 1980s.

Arunachal Pradesh, formerly known as the North East Frontier Agency, is one of the youngest states of the Union of India. Before attaining statehood in 1987, it was a Union Territory directly under the control of the central government. Unlike other states of the Union, Arunachal Pradesh was granted statehood not on the basis of linguistic homogeneity, but due to considerations of its diverse ethnic make up. It is an ethnic *pot-pourri* and home to some 25 big and medium size tribal groups and some 110 small and very small sub-tribes with little or no linguistic and cultural similarities. Arunachal Pradesh also enjoys a unique position in terms of various legal and statutory safeguards provided to it under the Indian Constitution.

Arunachal Pradesh, for example, is a protected area under the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935, with internal control mechanisms such as the inner-line permit system where even *bonafide* Indian citizens of non-indigenous origins are denied entry into the state without prior permission from the state authorities. Yet another example of such statutory safeguards is the application of the sixth schedule of the Constitution which debar the non-indigenous Indians from buying land in the state. The underlying philosophy behind the introduction of these statutory safeguards was to protect the culture and identity of the indigenous peoples from the onslaught of external influences. Such protective mechanisms have long been in existence and date

back to 1873 when the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act was passed by the colonial regime. Hence, the uninterrupted continuation of these protectionist measures has only forced the Arunachalis to demand an explanation for the arrival and continuing presence of the refugees in the state.

Limpert's construction of the background neglects the changing nature of the demographic pattern in view of the settlement of the Chakmas and Hajongs in the state. According to the 1991 Census, the total indigenous population is merely 5,50,351 out of a total population of 8,64,558. A careful analysis reveals that the Chakmas have already become the second largest population, next only to the Nishing community. Further, the Chakmas already outnumber the indigenous peoples in Lohit and Changlang districts where they also dominate economically.

In addition, in the North East, relations between the state and the indigenous minorities have long been problematic, leading to frequent outbursts of violence or protracted insurgencies. The indigenous minorities in the North East are geographically concentrated and have traditionally viewed external authority as an imposition on their semi-autonomous status. In the face of greater administrative penetration of the post-colonial state, and threatened by growing in-migration of the low land people, the phenomenon of refugee flow from neighbouring Bangladesh and other countries has further worsened the situation.

Given the precariously delicate demographic configuration and ever-increasing ethno-cultural vulnerability, the indigenous peoples fear that they stand to lose land as well as employment; that political power will shift out of their hands, and that they might even be reduced to a minority in their own home, living under the hegemony of those who are clearly seen as 'foreigners'.

There are other problems in Limpert's account of the Chakma question. Although Limpert treats the Chakmas and Hajongs as stateless peoples, he fails to explicate clearly as to what marked the transition of the Chakmas and Hajongs from refugees to stateless peoples. He also makes a strong plea for grant of citizenship to the Chakmas and Hajongs. I agree with his contention that the Chakmas and Hajongs are eligible for grant of Indian citizenship as per the terms and conditions of the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972. But eligibility in itself does not guarantee the acquisition of any right. Moreover, the Indira-Mujib Agreement only states that '...the Chakma and Hajong refugees who came to India from the

erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) before 25 March 1971 will be *considered* (my emphasis) for the grant of citizenship.'

In yet another reference, while drawing inference from the Supreme Court's ruling in the *State of Arunachal Pradesh vs. Khudiram Chakma*, Limpert contents that '...only citizens were permitted to purchase land in protected areas under the Foreigners' order of 1948. As Arunachal Pradesh was declared a protected area under the Government of India Act, 1935 the Chakma families' acquisition of lands outside the Chakma Allotment Areas would be valid only if they were found to be citizens of India' (p.44). This, however, is not true. The Foreigners Order of 1948 and the Government of India Act 1935, when read with the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution makes it amply clear that *not all Indian citizens are entitled to lay claim over land in Arunachal Pradesh*. Contrary to his contention, even if the Chakmas were found to be Indian citizens, this would not entitle them to any legitimate claim over land, as land is exclusively under the control of the scheduled tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

These issues are raised (not to weaken the claim of the Chakmas Hajongs to citizenship) to emphasize that Limpert attaches undue importance to a bilateral agreement and much less to the reasons which have prevented the Indian state from conferring citizenship on these people. Ironically the citizenship issue no longer occupies a significant place on the agenda of either the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) or the state government. What is agitating the indigenous peoples and their leaders is the issue of permanent settlement of the Chakmas and Hajongs and their demand to be considered as the scheduled tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

Another problem with Limpert's account is his outright rejection of AAPSU – which he claims to be a 'private entity'. By focusing merely on AAPSU's role in the last three years during which it did harden its stance, Limpert conveniently overlooks the long history of AAPSU's peaceful involvement with the refugee issue since the early 1980s. Interestingly, in the formative years of the movement against the refugees, the state government came down heavily on AAPSU leaders and members as several of them were beaten up and arrested by the police while protesting against the continuing presence of the Chakmas and Hajongs. The state government, however, joined the movement against the refugees only at a much later stage when it was no longer possible for it to contain

the rising popular aspirations of the indigenous peoples against the refugees.

In a state with a strong tradition of single party dominance, AAPSU has clearly emerged as an important pressure group by being the most articulate spokesman of the people on several issues – the most important of which is the Chakma question. The AAPSU looks at the central government's plan of permanently settling the Chakmas and Hajongs in the state as part of a larger design to 'deindigenize' and 'disempower' the indigenous peoples. It is because of such fears, perceived or real, that the indigenous peoples under AAPSU's leadership have been reacting strongly. Limpert's allegations against the AAPSU as a 'private entity' and 'collaborator' of the state government in unleashing a systematic campaign against the Chakmas and Hajongs is not only unfounded, but also confirms his lack of awareness of a long-drawn popular movement by AAPSU.

The central problem in Limpert's account is that his approach is structured within a narrow framework of legal regime discourse analysis. Such an approach invariably gets entangled in unending legal debates over a problem which deserves serious socio-anthropological attention. This is not to suggest that legal dimensions of such a problem are insignificant or uncalled for; they do constitute the foundation on which the edifice of any humanitarian law is erected. However, what we often forget in such obsessive engagements with legalities is that, no matter how good these laws and policies may appear on paper, they are in reality only as good as they are effective in evoking compliance. Compliance comes easily and voluntarily only when the laws and policies are perceived by those whom they affect as fair and consistent with their own perceptions of the problem.

Perhaps, a better way to approach such a problem would be to look at it through the prism of perceptions. The views of all the parties concerned should be brought together in an effort to dispassionately and objectively analyze them against the background of legal provisions. This would facilitate a better understanding of the problem and help bring forth some of the contradictions inherent in the laws and policies applicable to stateless peoples and refugees. Such an approach would also help reconcile the conflicting interests of both the refugees and the local host society.

**Deepak K. Singh**

Research Scholar, Punjab University  
Chandigarh

# Backpage

THE death of Pol Pot, surprisingly unnoticed barring the routine news-coverage and a few desultory obituaries, brings to an end what undoubtedly was one of the bloodiest careers in modern history. As the head of the Khmer Rouge, at one stage lauded by many as a progressive national liberation movement, Pol Pot and his associates subjected Cambodia and the Khmer people to a genocide that in relative, if not absolute, terms has few parallels. Estimates vary, but most experts would today agree that the killing fields of Cambodia claimed over 3 million lives.

Ideas are often seen as a motor force of history. What is less often realised is that mistaken ideas, when embedded in a totalising vision and backed by organisational power, have the ability to wreak destruction on an unprecedented scale. We invariably refer to the Holocaust under Hitler's Third Reich which claimed the lives of over six million European Jews. For Hitler and the Nazi Party, the Jews were a pestilence, an impurity that had to be eliminated for the Aryan (German) race to realise its true greatness.

Not so in the case of Pol Pot. Here was no racial zealot locating the greatness of his peoples in an imaginary past. Under him there were no pogroms against the ethnic 'other' – those of a Vietnamese or Chinese origin. If anything, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge was imbued with a zeal to totally reconstruct society, to eliminate all traces of the past (feudal) society, to create a new man.

Central to this new vision was depopulation of the city – a site not just for a breeding of bourgeois, anti-people ideas, but parasitic since it fed itself (literally) on the labour of the farmers. Every adult was now expected to contribute to the production of food, either willingly or under coercion, if necessary. No opposition was to be brooked in the carrying out of this glorious vision. And if people had to be killed to help them see reason, so be it. Eggs, after all, have to be broken to make an omlette. A leaf out of Stalin's maxim: 'So what if the waters of the Volga ran red with the blood of the Russian people. At least it ushered in Socialism.'

As distressing as the genocide in Cambodia, and the support it received from the socialist brotherhood, was the ideological appreciation it elicited from leading intellectuals. Malcolm Caldwell was most vocal

in support of the new policy. So was Samir Amin, incidentally co-student along with Khieu Samphan in Paris in the early 1950s. Few remember that the early blueprinting of a new Cambodia was first outlined in Samphan's doctoral thesis. Fortunately, Joan Robinson was silent, having burnt her fingers earlier with her appreciation of The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. A rare exception was Kathleen Gough, incidentally 'attacked' for her revisionist views. Herein lies the second lesson of such tragedies. Intellectuals, particularly when keen to change the world, seem to lose all sense of proportion in their support to such causes. More so when they do not have to bear the brunt of the policies they advocate.

As a final aside it may be remembered that even after the genocidal regime of Pol Pot had been overthrown, and the true scale of the horrors perpetrated could no longer be hidden, the pages of *The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* for years carried 'learned' contributions debating the exact toll – whether it was 2.75 or 2.8 million. I suppose if one could prove that the death figures were lower by a few thousand, the tragedy itself could be wished away. Worse, earlier ideological adversaries, later global collaborators, the U.S. and China, continued to support Pol Pot to the bitter end.

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge that he helped construct should not be forgotten. More than tin-pot dictators like Idi Amin, Mbotu or Papa Duvalier, he, along with his illustrious predecessors like Stalin or even Mao, is a reminder of the horrors we can willingly perpetrate in the service of the true cause. He also forces us to be a little cautious when recommending radical social surgery, of trying to write history on a clean slate.

Closer home, we can hardly claim immunity from such tendencies – be they sectarian, communal or radical. Even as the trauma of the Partition has barely been contained, we are being subjected to a variety of exclusivist appeals. Arguments extolling our diversity and pluralism, or that we are fundamentally a tolerant society are inadequate as a basis for hope. For that we consciously need to work towards a new political culture. For a start, we must change our language of political description.

**Harsh Sethi**

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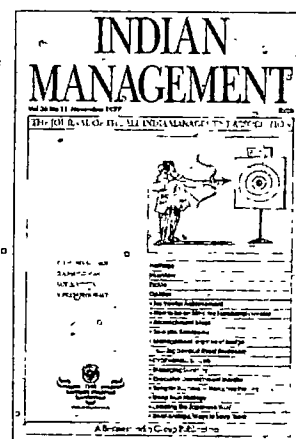
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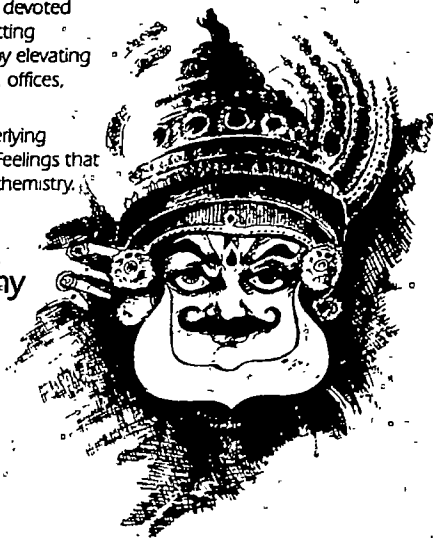
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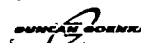
  
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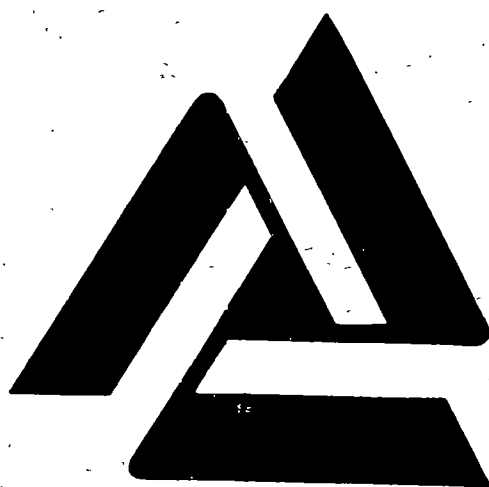


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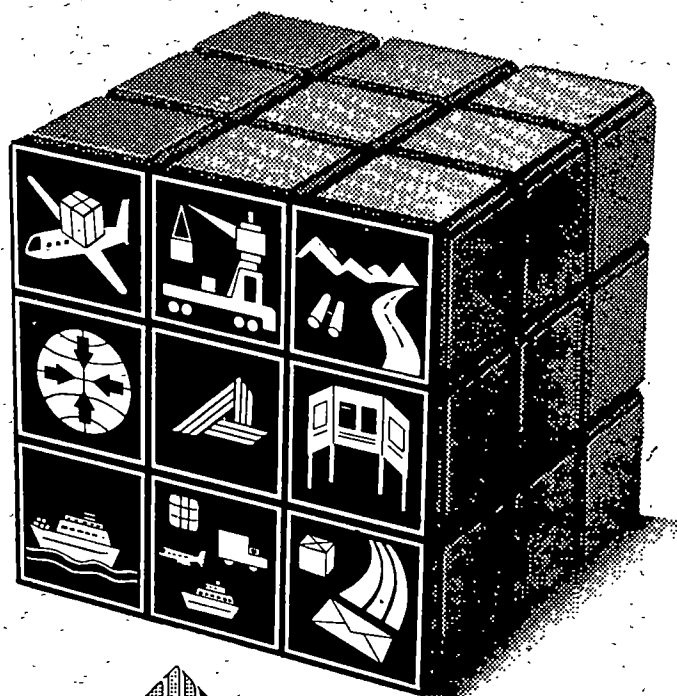
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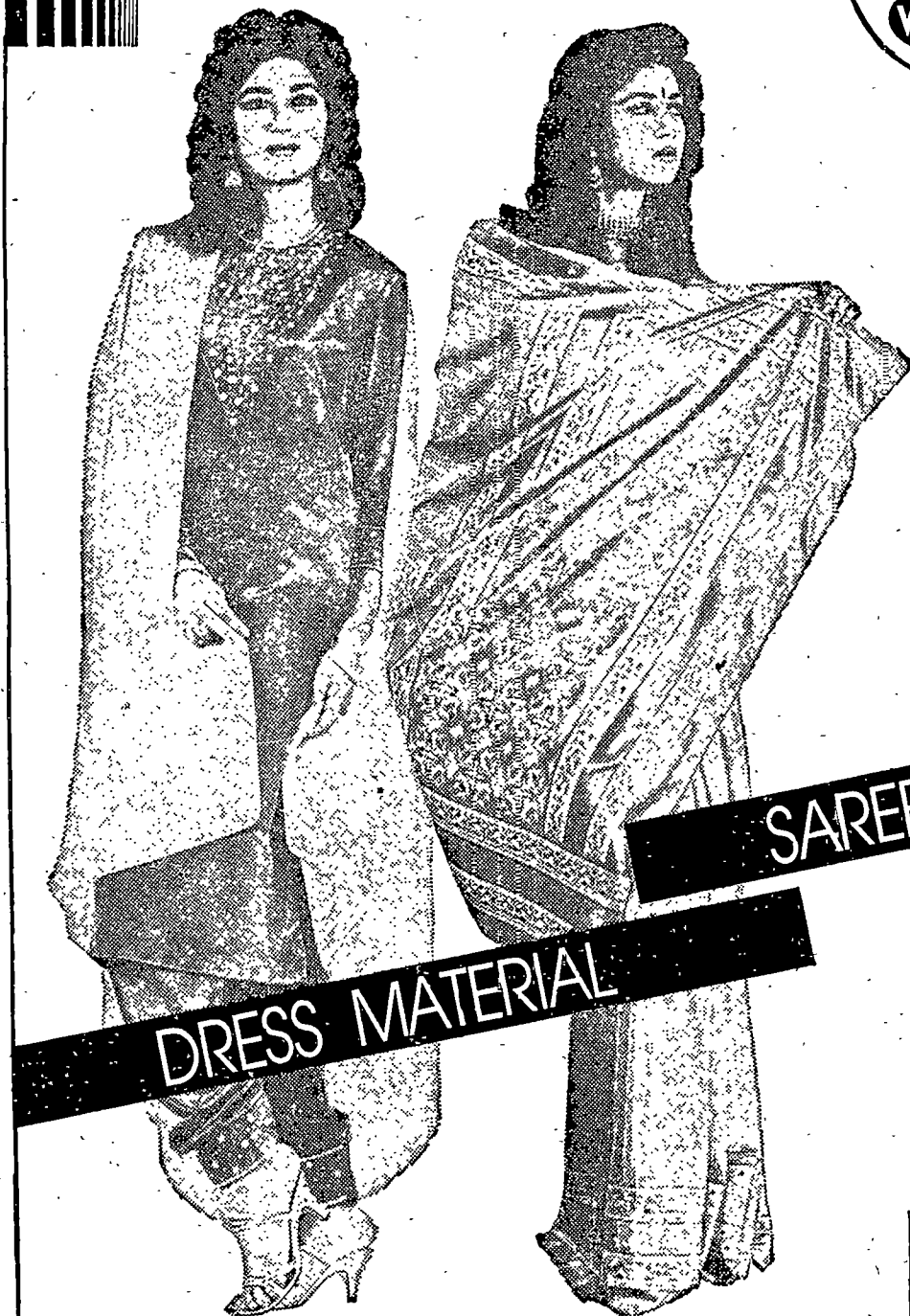
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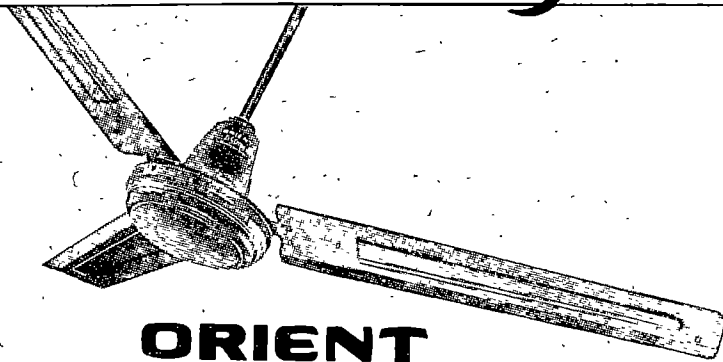
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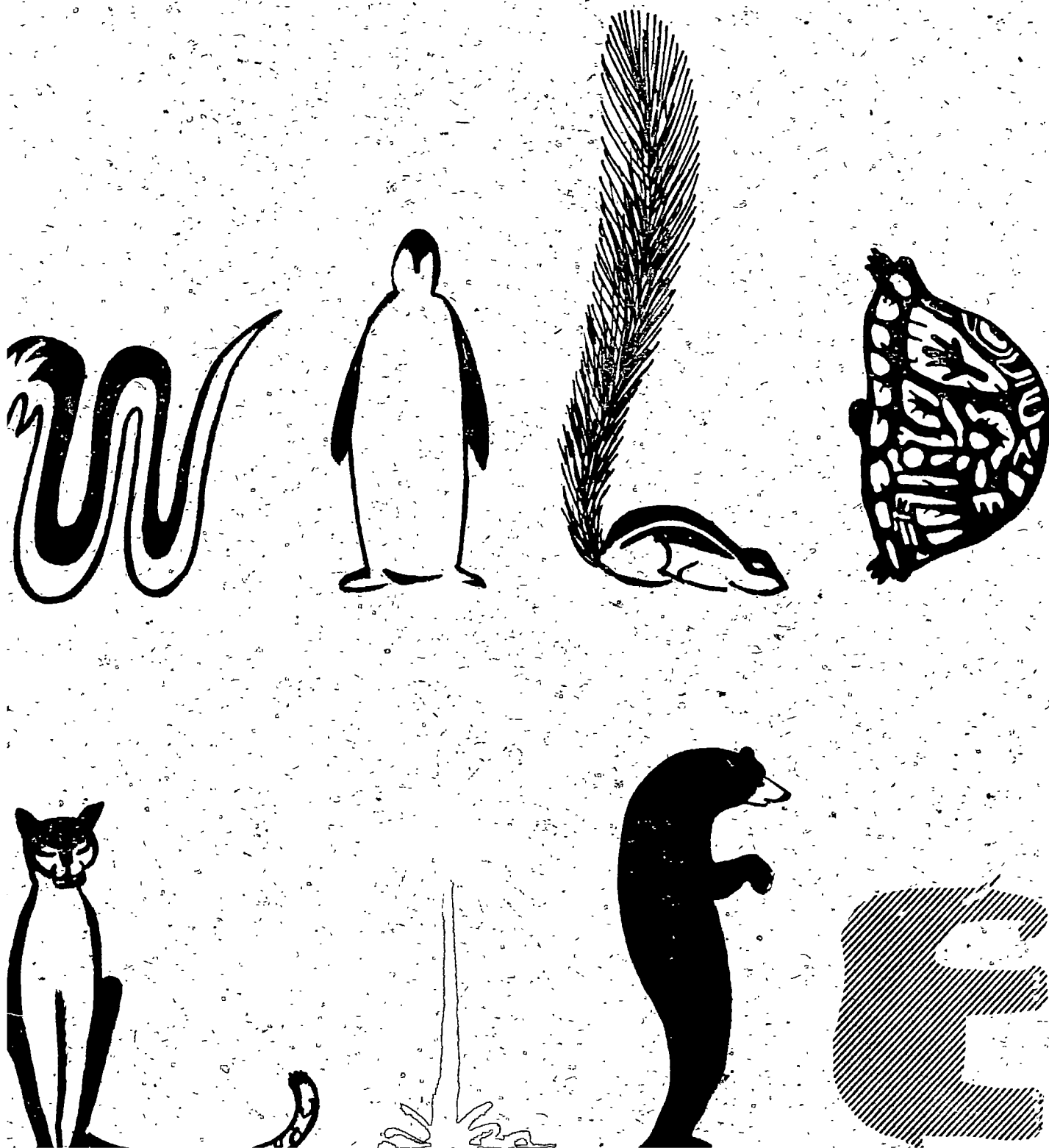
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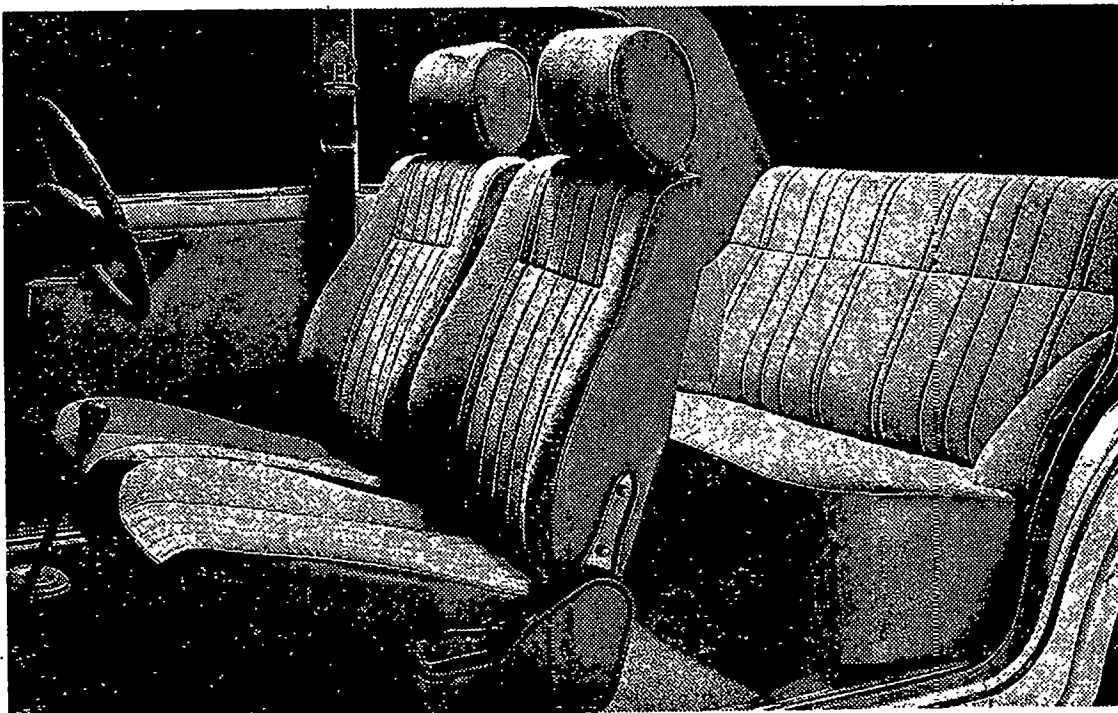
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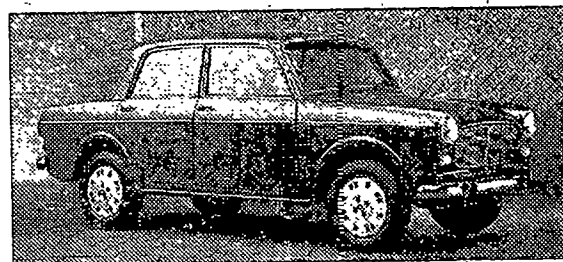
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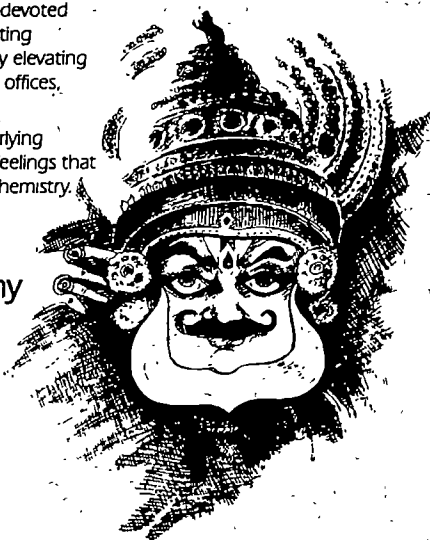
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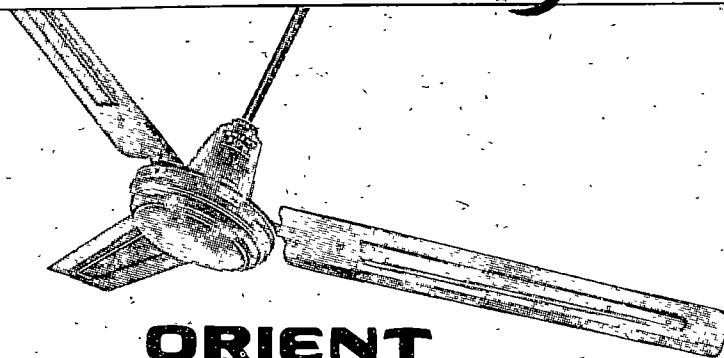
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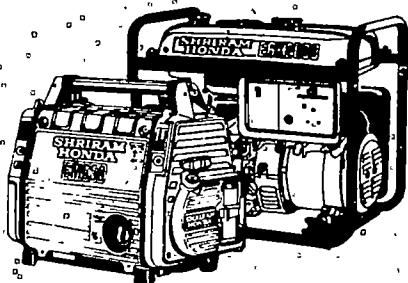
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# 466

## WILDLIFE

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### symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
Posed by **Vasant K. Saberwal**, Research Associate,  
Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore
- 17 **THE AUTHORITARIAN BIOLOGIST**  
**Ramachandra Guha**, environmental historian and writer,  
Bangalore
- 25 **SACRED GROVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**  
**K. Ullas Karanth**, Wildlife Conservation Society  
(India Programme), Bangalore
- 31 **ONE-SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL**  
**Renec M. Borges**, Centre for Ecological Sciences,  
Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore
- 37 **MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS**  
**Asad R. Rahmani**, Director, Bombay Natural History Society,  
Mumbai
- 41 **A PRINCELY BEQUEST**  
**Divyabhanusinh**, author; former Vice President of the BNHS;  
Member Cat Group, Species Survival Commission, IUCN, Delhi
- 46 **A PROBLEM WITH PACHYDERMS**  
**Vivek Menon**, conservation biologist; has been involved  
with anti-poaching and wildlife crime for a decade, Delhi
- 50 **ANIMAL FARM**  
**Indrancil Das**, IUCN/SSC South Asian Reptile and Amphibian  
Specialist Group, Centre for Herpetology, Mamallapuram
- 53 **WILDLIFE RESEARCH**  
**R.J. Ranjit Daniels**, Professor of Biodiversity,  
M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai
- 57 **A GREAT LEGACY DISSIPATED**  
**M. Krishnan**, *died 1996*; was a veteran naturalist and photographer
- 59 **FATAL LINKS**  
**Valmik Thapar**, author; Executive Director,  
The Ranthambhore Foundation, Delhi
- 70 **RESTRICTING HUMAN ACTIVITY**  
**M.D. Madhusudan**, Centre for Ecological Research  
and Conservation, Mysore
- 74 **NATURE AT STAKE**  
**Amita Baviskar**, Department of Sociology, University of Delhi
- 79 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by **Sharachchandra Lele**, **Mahesh Rangarajan**,  
**Sumit Guha**, **Vasant K. Saberwal**, **Stella D'Costa**,  
**T.R. Shankar Raman**, **Rohan D'souza**, **Nandini Sundar**  
and **Carol Upadhyia**.
- 92 **FURTHER READING**  
Compiled by **Vasant K. Saberwal**
- 96 **COMMENTS**  
Received from **Mahesh Rangarajan**, Delhi, and  
**Anjali Monteiro** and **K.P. Jayasankar**, Mumbai
- 100 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by **Madhu Chowdhury**  
of Dilip Chowdhury Associates

# The problem

WILDLIFE conservation in India, as in most parts of the world, is complex and often contentious. What on the surface appears to be a simple issue of protecting wild animals and plants from forces beyond their control, quickly dissolves, on closer inspection, into a complex tangle of conflictual issues: human rights versus the protection of animals and forests; the exclusion of all humans from protected areas versus the possibility of human coexistence with wildlife; exclusive state control over protected areas versus increased local participation in protected area management. Indeed, beyond the broad objective of preserving nature, there is often little in common among the various positions adopted by conservationists as to the specifics of what is to be protected, for, by and from whom.

Conservation practice necessarily entails the imposition of regulations over access to certain resources, with specific people or institutions attempting to define who has access to which resources, and on what terms. The outcomes of negotiated access to resources are largely a reflection of power relations at the local, regional or national level. There are critical questions revolving around our understanding of how ecosystems work, and the need to use accurate science in the management of protected areas. But here too, the links between power and knowledge influence our perception of the natural world, and the optimal means of managing it. Conservation practice is, therefore, a profoundly political process. I will make a simple point in this essay: what gets conserved and by whom will ultimately be determined by social and political processes as much, if not more, than by the scientific knowledge we bring to bear on resource management.

*State vs. local controls:* The central stand-off in Indian conservation is the question of whether protected areas should be inviolate and managed by the state, or whether local communities should have a bigger say in the management of protected areas, including, if need be, access to resources within these areas. In this discussion neither the demonization of the state nor the romanticization of local communities is of much value.

Can the state enforce unpopular policies that exclude local communities from conservation areas? The simple answer is no, not on a sustained basis. While the posting of guards may ensure the absence of villagers from the more high profile sections of national parks, there is little the state can do against anonymous 'crimes', such as the setting of a forest on fire or the poisoning of carnivore kills in the hope of killing lions, tigers, and other carnivores. Such actions are in part an expression of the alienation of villagers from conservation programmes that deny them access to basic necessities. In turn, such animosity may translate into heightened support for poaching, an activity that is most effective with local contacts, but also most effectively checked through the use of local contacts. Whether the state or the poacher captures the support of the local communities largely depends on the latter's degree of alienation from the resource and the state.

The divided nature of the state is another reason for its ineffectiveness in controlling local access to resources. The state is divided both vertically and horizontally. Rarely do the agendas of the lowest functionaries of the state align with those of policy makers – if only because of an inability of the state to provide adequate salaries to its lowest staff. In the absence of adequate compensation, but even if compensation were to be raised, there is little reason to assume an alignment of forest guard and policy-maker interests regarding what needs to be conserved and the means of conserving the same. Guards hired from local villages are far more likely to have sympathies with the people among whom they have kin and other long-standing ties. Guards may, of course, choose to enforce restrictions on some members of the community; this is, however, as likely to be an exercise of power as an attempt to conserve, say the wild flowers of the Himalaya, and is a shaky premise for long-term efforts at conserving nature.

There are also horizontal divisions within the state, deriving in part from conflicting mandates to different departments. But let us leave that for the moment, and concentrate on what to my mind is the more crucial issue of potential differences in the

agendas of politicians and bureaucrats. However imperfectly Indian democracy may appear to function, politicians will eventually respond to voter demands over the lifting of restrictions on access to forest resources. It is simply a question of the issue coming to gain sufficient importance in a given constituency.

Politicians elected on an anti-conservation plank will, eventually, denotify protected areas, as has happened in parts of Gujarat (Kothari et al. 1996), and for which there are demands in many parts of Madhya Pradesh. They will do this for two reasons: they benefit personally by allowing industrialists preferential access to the mineral and forest wealth within these areas, and they benefit politically from fulfilling electoral promises. Variations to this theme have been reported within the context of local access to reserve forests in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka (Saberwal forthcoming, Someshwar 1995). In such instances, local community leaders and politicians are determining the use of forests and grasslands and not the Forest Department, the agency mandated to manage these resources.

There is, then, a *political* problem associated with exclusionist conservation policies of the Indian Forest Department. A long-term effective implementation of such policy borders on the impossible.

In response to what has been perceived to be a fundamentally unjust policy, numerous environmental and social activists have argued for the need to provide local communities with a greater role in protected area management. This is seen as being both inherently more equitable than an exclusionary policy, and a more effective means of conserving natural resources.

An extreme position among many social activists is for the handing over of all protected areas to the sole care of local communities. But there are other, less drastic, measures suggested by many, both within and outside the country. Following the successes of Joint Forest Management, there are now proposals for Joint Protected Area Management, in which local communities are seen as having greater managerial and decision-making responsibility than is currently the case. Giving up the ground currently occupied by the exclusionary conservation lobby, there is an interna-

tional interest in eco-development, which is seen as encouraging eco-friendly development within villages with the aim of improving the financial status of villagers, thereby reducing their dependence on resources within protected areas.

There are also examples from many parts of the country of local action enabling the Forest Department to achieve its own conservation goals. The Tarun Bharat Sangh, for example, has successfully agitated for a ban on mining activities on land adjoining Sariska National Park in Rajasthan. Similarly, inhabitants of villages that adjoin the Kailadevi Sanctuary, also in Rajasthan, have successfully come together to prevent migratory pastoralists from moving through the sanctuary, owing to the fear that the annual migrations of lakhs of sheep and goats are responsible for the absence of forest regeneration. In each instance, there is a convergence of local and state interests, with the latter's interests being served by the (political) mobilization of the villagers.

But this second example also points to a problem with the whole approach to increasing local participation, and that is one of defining what the local community is. We have here a situation of a coincidence of the interests of both the Forest Department and of the local villagers in the desire to reduce pastoralist presence in the area. Pastoralists, however, would argue that they too comprise the 'local', and that their rights to use the area are at least as 'traditional' as those of the villagers. Riven as Indian communities are by caste, class and other divisions, and given that in a specific context there are numerous stake-holders, how does one identify the limits of the 'local community' that will control access to resources? While the call to hand over control to local communities has a moral authority that is incontestable, even those who believe in it have to deconstruct the category of the community. This is vital if conservation is to be rooted at the local level (see also Rangarajan 1996).

Many commentators have romanticized local communities, particularly with regard to the ecological harmony of their lifestyles and the egalitarian and equitable functioning of their institutions. Research has

demonstrated, however, that local power structures are often equally or more responsible than the state in creating conditions of dependency and poverty (see Yáng 1989, Sivaramakrishnan 1996). A simple shifting of controls from the state to the local level may ultimately do little more than reinforce unequal relations of power at the local level. The means of empowering local communities need to be carefully thought out, including a conceptualization of the possible role the state can play in effecting and sustaining such change.

But the basic fact remains: we need to better involve village communities in conservation programmes, not because of lifestyles that 'are in harmony with nature', nor owing to the 'egalitarian local institutions' that will ensure equitable access to resources. Rather, if we continue to alienate local communities, we will, per force, be helping to politicize conservation issues, resulting in a sidelining of foresters and others with an interest in conservation. Instead, conservationists could use electoral power to apply political pressure to force the eviction of extractive industries, such as mining and forestry, from areas of conservation interest. Such political mobilization, in the interests of conservation, rather than against it, is likely to take place only where local communities are part of, and not excluded from, conservation policy and practice.

*Keeping people out, letting them in:* Involving villages in conservation programmes is of course rather vague. Let us assume that our purpose is to generate support for conservation initiatives, or at least minimize villager hostility to conservation measures. To focus on the latter, as I have pointed out above, a key source of animosity towards conservation programmes initiated by Forest Departments is the attempt to exclude people from national parks, tiger reserves and the like. The question is: is a blanket ban on human use of resources within national parks necessary? If the answer is a conditional no, then one has a potential means of enhancing local support for conservation. Let us examine the scientific debate over the exclusion of people from conservation areas in some detail.

Various justifications have been used over time to keep people out of areas of conservation interest. The notion that subsistence hunting pressures would lead to a decline in wildlife populations was used in much of the colonized world, even as sport hunting, often on a massive scale, was both permitted and extolled (Rangarajan 1996). Over the past two centuries, however, a second, more powerful idea has supported this exclusion of people from protected areas: the notion of a delicate balance in nature. Within this construc-

tion of nature, arguably linked to Christian mythology (see Worster 1985), nature is seen as being comprised of individual components linked through various chains in a vast food web. Each delicate and easily disturbed link helps to maintain an overall balance in nature. Human activities within such a framework such as fire, grazing, and shifting cultivation have been seen as 'un-natural' and necessarily a disturbance and threat to the delicate web of life.

Indeed, the notion of nature as a delicate web has constituted a key underpinning to theoretical ecology until as recently as the 1980s, and continues to inform popular perceptions of the natural world. For society at large this is often the most powerful rationale for a continuation with a policy to keep people out of protected areas.

More recent research, however, has suggested a more chaotic, and less deterministic, functioning of nature. Human disturbances in such situations are simply seen as being a part of the system. Fire regimes have been shown to play a significant role in shaping the structure and composition of savanna, prairie, and forest communities. East African pastoralists, for example, regularly burn dead vegetation in order to encourage the growth of fresh shoots, and to prevent the conversion of savanna to scrub bush (Homewood and Rodgers 1991). Serengeti National Park is a part of this savanna, and the periodic pastoralist burning it is subject to, needs to be seen as an integral part of the system that sustains the greatest assemblage of wild mammals in the world. There are other examples of fire playing critical roles in shaping forest and grassland communities (Cowling et al. 1985, Langston 1995, Belsky 1992, Howe 1994).

The response of systems to fire is primarily dependent on the evolutionary history of the species that comprise the system. Thus, given a long history of being subject to a particular burning regime, an ecosystem may be comprised of fire-tolerant or fire-dependent species. In such cases, the removal of fire may lead to an invasion of exotics that are competitively superior in a decreased fire environment. Conversely, the introduction of fire to a system unused to being burned may result in the invasion of exotics capable of withstanding the stress of fire. Therefore an alteration to a fire regime is likely to alter system characteristics. How one evaluates such change is a function of one's management objectives.

Similarly, intense grazing pressure may be responsible for maintaining high levels of species diversity within grasslands that have historically been



subject to such grazing pressure, as has been shown by research in the East African savanna, the North American prairie, and the species rich chalk grasslands of England and Northern Europe (Belsky 1992, McNaughton 1993, During and Willems 1986, Howe 1994). In the absence of grazing, taller species may outgrow shorter species, thereby 'shading' the latter out. In effect, grazing may reduce the height advantage a dominant species may hold, thereby reducing the dominance of a few species and increasing overall species diversity. Amidst considerable controversy over exclusion of livestock grazing from Keoladeo National Park and the Valley of Flowers National Park, reports indicate respective decreases in bird and plant species diversity in the two areas (Ali and Vijayan 1986, Naithani et al. 1992). The absence of research precludes a detailed evaluation of other Indian experiences of the consequences of altering long-standing grazing regimes.

Research suggests that grassland species that have evolved under an intense grazing regime have developed physiological adaptations that enable a high tolerance to grazing losses (Caldwell et al. 1981). On the other hand, in regions with a shorter history of grazing pressures, intense grazing can devastate a flora, leading to the invasion of unpalatable grasses and woody species as has been demonstrated in the Galapagos islands and the inter-mountain American West (Hobbs and Huenneke 1994). Whether grazing constitutes a disruption to a system, or, as a disturbance, is an integral part of the system, depends very much on the history of the region's grazing regime.

Theoretical treatments of fluctuations in biodiversity indicate low levels of biodiversity at both the high and the low extremes of the disturbance spectrum, and high levels of species diversity at moderate levels of disturbance (Connell 1978, Milchunas et al. 1988, Petraitis et al. 1989). Climatic disturbances such as fire, drought, flooding, hurricanes, and so on, have all been seen as increasing the general heterogeneity within an ecosystem, thereby leading to both a greater diversity of habitat types, and consequently, a greater faunal diversity. The same heterogeneity of habitat types can result from human use of a system, including heavy grazing, burning, indigenous farming systems and the like. It goes without saying that the disturbance hypothesis cannot be used to suggest that any and all human activity can be encouraged within a protected area. The idea, however, that *all* human resource utilization within protected areas is inimical to the conservation of biological diversity is hard to sustain in the face of such an argument. From a purely

ecological standpoint, there may be value in allowing a continuation of certain local land use practices.<sup>1</sup>

Such a position, of course, assumes that some level of regulation will take place to ensure that resource use remains in concert with the achievement of conservation objectives. In turn, this implies management based on monitoring, and the use of judgements regarding what constitutes acceptable levels of resource harvesting. Once again, we arrive at a political crossroads in conservation. Whose judgement is to be used with regard to what constitutes land degradation? In response to this question, one hears the claims to sole expertise, articulated by officials of the Forest Department and by research scientists. This expertise is premised on the 'scientific', and hence superior, training of scientists. The unsophisticated knowledge of herders, cultivators, and forest users, is seen as being too primitive to be of use in forest management. In counterpoint, one also hears claims, some rather shrill, of the superiority of 'indigenous knowledge' over 'western science', derived as the former is from a lived experience rather through the 'unreal' world of experimentation.

Mine may be a caricature of the polarized nature of positions adopted by different groups of people, but only marginally so. There is often an explicit dismissal of local knowledge as being unscientific, as also a romanticization of local knowledge as somehow having all the answers. It is the political issue par excellence, for the claim to knowledge is also the claim to power. As with most issues related to conservation, the reality is necessarily somewhere in between the two positions. Science has tremendous power through the use of statistics and the appropriate design of experiments to acquire knowledge of how systems function. The problem is that environmental variability from one year to the next coupled with the co-variation one is routinely confronted with in nature, generates difficulties in establishing causality with regard to ecological phenomenon. In contrast, years, and in some contexts,

1. A key response to this position is that most such examples are from areas with low population densities, and that the same logic would not hold within the context of India's population pressures. I would argue the need examine the issue on a site-specific basis (there is a need to deconstruct the Indian 'population problem'). Certainly many parts of the alpine meadows of the Himalaya are not necessarily subject to increasing population pressures (Saberwal forthcoming). The same may be true of other parts of India with difficult terrain—including the Thar desert and the north-east Himalaya. In any case, a blanket ban on human resource use may not be necessary, and we need to explore the conditions under which human resource use is compatible with achieving conservation goals.

generations of experience, may provide clues regarding 'normal' and 'deviant' ecosystem behaviour. The question is, can we develop the sophistication to mix deductive and inductive reasoning, or are we too fixed in our ways to be willing to look at complex problems using any and all sources of information?

There are no easy solutions. But this is to be expected, given that one is dealing with emotionally and politically charged issues. But as we, individually or collectively, claim the high moral ground in speaking on behalf of those unable to express themselves (plants, animals, or 'helpless' local communities), there is a need to recognize our tendency to work with dualities that are necessarily simplifications of inherently complex phenomenon. Should people be out or in? Should the state or should local people manage protected areas? Should 'western science' or 'indigenous knowledge' provide the basis for resource management?

For the most part, these are political questions. But then, to reiterate my point through this paper, conservation is about politics. And to effect better conservation we need to function as part of the wider political process – not solely as social scientists and scientists who have the 'best' answers. In a situation in which people's livelihoods and security are at stake, there are no solutions that will satisfy everyone. The question is: can we prevent a politicization of conservation whereby the backlash from exclusionary conservation results in politicians making decisions regarding the future of national parks, rather than the managers, scientists and local communities that currently stake claims to this management. Perhaps the unwillingness of conservationists of different hues to give ground to those from other camps hides the larger truth of the extreme difficulties involved in creating working coalitions. But as with the larger national political scene, and perhaps linked to the growing number of political fora for disadvantaged communities, I suspect that the era of a single constituency controlling all that happens within India's protected areas is drawing to an end. We can try to bring local communities on board, along with all the complexity that entails, or we can stand by and watch as industry, cultivation, herds of animals encroach upon protected areas, dams.... Much of this will happen with the support, or in response to the demands, of local communities alienated by an environmental movement rooted in what is ultimately an urban pre-occupation with a specific, culturally defined vision of nature.

VASANT K SABERWAL

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# The authoritarian biologist

RAMACHANDRA GUHA

*Where will be taxonomists and evolutionists when cows and corns dominate the earth?*

Hugh Iltis, writing in 1967.

*If biologists want a tropics in which to biologize, they are going to have to buy it with care, energy, effort, strategy, tactics, time and cash.*

Daniel Janzen, writing in 1986.

*Conservation and biology are interdependent and inseparable because biology is at the heart of all phases of conservation and is the ultimate arbiter of its success and failure.*

David Ehrenfelds, in his editorial in *Conservation Biology*, 1987.

*Any grandiose plan for the conservation of wildlife without adequate provision for human interests is doomed to fail. Conservation in developing countries often has to be a compromise between scientific idealism and practical reality.*

Raman Sukumar, in his doctoral dissertation of 1985.

WHEN India became independent, in 1947, it had less than half-a-dozen wildlife reserves; it now has in excess of four hundred parks and sanctuaries, covering 4.3% of the country (there are proposals to double this area).

\* An earlier version of this essay was published in *The Ecologist*, 27(1), 1997.

Wildlife conservation controls big territory and is now big business too. Nor is this country exceptional in this regard. In response to a growing global market for nature tourism, and egged on by strong domestic pressures, other Asian and African nations have undertaken ambitious programmes to conserve and demarcate habitats and species that need to be 'protected for posterity'.

One might, at a pinch, identify five major groups that together fuel the movement for wildlife conservation in the Third World. The first are the city-dwellers and foreign tourists who merely season their lives, a week at a time, with the wild. Their motive is straightforward: pleasure and fun. The second group consists of ruling elites who view the protection of particular species (e.g. the tiger in India) as central to the retention or enhancement of national prestige. Willing on this process are international conservation organizations, such as the IUCN and the WWF, who work with a sense of mission at 'educating' people and politicians to the virtues of biological conservation.

A fourth group consists of functionaries of the state forest or wildlife service mandated by law to be in physical control of the parks. While some officials are genuinely inspired by a love of nature, the majority – at least in India – are motivated merely by the power and spin-off benefits (overseas trips, for example) that come with the job. The final group are biologists, who believe in wilderness and species preservation for the sake of 'science'.

These five groups are united in their hostility to the farmers, herders, swiddeners and hunters who have lived in the 'wild' from well before it became a 'park' or 'sanctuary'. They see these human communities as having a destructive effect on the environment; their forms of livelihood aiding the disappearance of species and contributing to soil erosion, habitat simplification, and worse. Their feelings are often expressed in strongly pejorative language.

**T**ouring Africa in 1957, one prominent member of the Sierra Club sharply attacked the Maasai for grazing cattle in African sanctuaries. He held the Maasai to be illustrative of a larger trend, wherein 'increasing population and increasing land use,' rather than industrial exploitation, constituted the main threat to the world's wilderness areas. The Maasai and 'their herds of economically worthless cattle,' he said, 'have already overgrazed and laid waste too much of the 23,000 square miles of Tanganyika they control, and as they move into the Serengeti, they bring the desert with them, and the wilderness and wildlife must bow before their herds.'<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years later, the World Wildlife Fund initiated a campaign to save the Madagascar rainforest, the home of the Ring Tailed Lemur, the

Madagascar Serpent Eagle, and other endangered species. Their fund raising posters had spectacular sketches of the lemur and the eagle and of the half-ton Elephant Bird which once lived on the island but is now extinct. Man 'is a relative newcomer to Madagascar,' noted the accompanying text, 'but even with the most basic of tools – axes and fire – he has brought devastation to the habitats and resources he depends on.' The posters also had a picture of a muddy river with the caption: 'Slash-and-burn agriculture has brought devastation to the forest, and in its wake, erosion of the topsoil.'<sup>2</sup>

**T**his poster succinctly summed up the conservationist position with regard to the tropical rainforest. This holds that the enemy of the environment is the hunter and farmer living in the forest, who is too short-sighted for his, and our, good. This belief (or prejudice) has informed the numerous projects, spread across the globe, to constitute nature parks by throwing out the original *human* inhabitants of these areas, with scant regard for their past or future. All this is done in the name of the global heritage of biological diversity. Cynics might conclude, however, that tribals in the Madagascar or Amazon forest are expected to move out only so that men in London or New York can have the comfort of knowing that the lemur or toucan has been saved for posterity – evidence of which is then provided for them by way of the wildlife documentary they can watch on their television screen.

## II

Let me now focus on the motives and motivations of one of the aforementioned groups: the conservation biologists. Biologists have, of course, been in the vanguard of the environmental movement in our time. The author of

the work that by common consent sparked modern environmentalism was a biologist, Rachel Carson. So were numerous other scholars and writers who contributed to shaping the environmental debate of the sixties and seventies. I think, for example, of Garret Hardin, Paul Ehrlich, Ray Dasmann in the United States; of C.J. Brejér in the Netherlands; of F. Fraser Darling and Julian Huxley in the United Kingdom; and of Bjorn Gillberg and Hans Palmstierna in Sweden (these examples could be multiplied).

Biology is a science that in three major respects differs from the disciplines of physics and chemistry. First, biologists are taught to look for interdependence in nature, viewing individual life forms not in isolation but in relation to one another. Ever since Darwin, biologists have also been oriented towards a longer time frame, thinking in aeons and generations rather than months and years. Finally, biologists have a direct professional interest in species other than humans; as ornithologists, botanists and zoologists, they are, willy-nilly, more alert to the interests of bird, plant or animal life. It must be said at once that this interest in other species sometimes blinds them to the legitimate interests of the less fortunate members of their own.

**T**he impatience with other humans is especially marked among conservation biologists, for whom farmers and forest-dwellers have come to represent a messy obstacle to the unimpeded progress of scientific research. A 'seeming goal of humanity,' writes Daniel Janzen in the *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 'is to convert the world to a pasture designed to produce and sustain humans as draught animals. The challenge, in which the tropical ecologist is a

general, knight, foot soldier, and technical specialist, is to prevent humanity from reaching this goal. *The true battle, is, however, to reprogramme humanity to a different goal.* The battle is being fought by many more kinds of professionals than just ecologists; however, it is a battle over the control of interactions, and by definition, the person competent at recognizing, understanding, and manipulating interactions is an ecologist.<sup>3</sup>

**W**hile the article's military metaphors and its appearance in a prestigious scientific journal are noteworthy, Janzen was only reiterating a well-worn theme. Over twenty years ago, a similar claim had been made by a botanist from the University of Wisconsin: 'If there is anybody who should provide leadership in the preservation movement it is the systematic or environmental biologist.... We are not only citizens and humans, each with individual desires. We are not only trained taxonomists and ecologists, each perhaps wishing to preserve the particular organisms with which we work. But we, the taxonomists and ecologists, are the *only ones in any position to know* the kinds, the abundance and the geography of life. This is a knowledge with vast implications for mankind, and therefore vast responsibilities. When nobody else knows, we do know where the wild and significant areas are, we know what needs to be saved and why; and only we know what is threatened with extinction.'<sup>4</sup>

Consider, finally, a recent assessment of global conservation by Michael Soulé, which complains that the language of policy documents has 'become more humanistic in values and more economic in substance, and correspondingly less naturalistic and ecocentric.' Soulé seems worried that in theory (though certainly not in prac-

tice!) some national governments and international conservation organizations (or ICOs) now pay more attention to the rights of human communities. Proof of this shift is the fact that 'the top and middle management of most ICOs are economists, lawyers, and development specialists, not biologists.' We have here a sectarian plaint, a trade union approach to the problem spurred by an alleged 'takeover of the international conservation movement by social scientists, particularly economists.'<sup>5</sup>

**S**oulé's essay, with its talk of conspiracies and takeover bids, manifests the paranoia of a community of scientists which has a *huge* influence on conservation policy but yet wants to be the sole dictator. A scholar acclaimed by his peers as the 'dean of tropical ecologists' has expressed this ambition more nakedly than most. I have already quoted from a paper published by Daniel Janzen in the *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*; let me now quote from a report he wrote on a new National Park in Costa Rica, whose tone and thrust perfectly complements the other, ostensibly 'scientific' essay. 'We have the seed and the biological expertise: we lack control of the terrain,' wrote Janzen in 1986. He was able to remedy this situation for himself by raising enough money to purchase the forest area needed to create the Guanacaste National Park.

One can only marvel at Janzen's conviction that he and his fellow biologists know all, and that the inhabitants of the forest know nothing. He justifies the taking over of the forest and the dispossession of the forest farmer by claiming that: 'Today virtually all of the present-day occupants of the western Mesoamerican pastures, fields and degraded forests are deaf, blind and mute to the fragments

of the rich biological and cultural heritage that still occupies the shelves of the unused and unappreciated library in which they reside.'<sup>6</sup>

**T**his is an ecologically updated version of the White Man's Burden, where the biologist (rather than the civil servant or military official) knows that it is in the native's true interest to abandon his home and hearth and leave the field and forest clear for the new rulers of his domain – not the animals he once co-existed with, but the biologists, park managers and wildlifers who shall now collectively determine how the territory is to be managed. In Costa Rica we only have Janzen's word for it, but elsewhere we are better placed to challenge the conservationist's point of view. A remarkable recent book on African conservation by Raymond Bonner, *At the Hand of Man*, has laid bare the imperialism, unconscious and explicit, of western wilderness lovers and biologists working on that luckless continent. Some of his conclusions are:

'Above all, Africans [have been] ignored, overwhelmed, manipulated and outmanoeuvred – by a conservation crusade led, orchestrated and dominated by white Westerners.'

'Livingstone, Stanley and other explorers and missionaries had come to Africa in the nineteenth century to promote the three C's – Christianity, commerce and civilization. Now a fourth was added: conservation. These modern secular missionaries were convinced that without the white man's guidance, the Africans would go astray.'

'[The criticisms] of egocentricity and neo-colonialism... could be leveled fairly at most conservation organizations working in the Third World.'

'As many Africans see it, white people are making rules to protect animals that white people want to see in parks that white people visit. Why should Africans support these programs?... The World Wildlife Fund professed to care about what the Africans wanted, but then tried to manipulate them into doing what the Westerners wanted: and those Africans who couldn't be brought into line were ignored.'

'Africans do not use the parks and they do not receive any significant benefits from them. Yet they are paying the costs. There are indirect economic costs – government revenues that go to parks instead of schools. And there are direct personal costs [i.e., of the ban on hunting and fuel-collecting, or of displacement].'<sup>7</sup>

**T**he remarks of a Zambian biologist, E.N. Chidumayo, reinforce Bonner's conclusions: 'Many conservation policies in Africa tended to serve foreign interests, such as tourism and safari hunting, and largely ignored African environmental values and cultures. In fact, the only thing that is African about most conventional conservation policies is that they are practiced on African land.'<sup>8</sup>

Bonner's book focuses on the elephant, one of the half-a-dozen or so animals that have come to acquire 'totemic' status among western wilderness lovers. Animal totems existed in most pre-modern societies, but as the Norwegian scholar Arne Kalland points out, in the past the injunction not to kill the totemic species applied only to members of the group. Hindus do not ask others to worship the cow; but those who love and cherish the elephant, seal, whale or tiger try and impose a worldwide prohibition on its killing. No one, they say, anywhere, anytime, shall be allowed to touch the animal they hold sacred even

if (as with the elephant and several species of whale) scientific evidence has established that small-scale hunting will not endanger its viable populations and will, in fact, save human lives put at risk by the expansion, after total protection, of the *lebensraum* of the totemic animal. The new totemists also insist that their species is the 'true, rightful inhabitant' of the ocean or forest, and ask that human beings who have lived in the same terrain (and with the animals) for millennia be taken out and sent elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

### III

**T**o turn now to an ongoing controversy in my own bailiwick. The Nagarhole National Park in southern Karnataka has an estimated 40 tigers, the species toward whose protection has been directed enormous amounts of Indian and foreign money and attention. Nagarhole is also home to about 6,000 tribal people, who have been in the area longer than anyone can remember, perhaps as long as the tigers themselves. The Karnataka state Forest Department wants the tribals out, claiming they destroy the forest and kill wild game. In response, the tribals answer that their demands are modest, consisting in the main of fuelwood, fruit, honey and the odd quail or partridge. They do not own guns, although coffee planters living on the edge of the forest do. Maybe it is the planters who poach the big game, they ask. In any case, if the forest is for tigers only, they query, why have the officials invited India's biggest hotel chain, Taj, to build a resort inside the park.

Into this controversy jumped a green missionary passing through Karnataka. John G. Robinson works for the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York, for whom he oversees 160 projects in 44 countries. He conducted a whistle-stop tour of Nagarhole

and called a press conference in the state capital, Bangalore. Throwing the tribals out of the park, he said, was the only means to save the wilderness. In Robinson's opinion, 'Relocating tribal or traditional people who live in these protected areas is the single most important step towards conservation.' Tribals, he explained, 'compulsively hunt for food,' and compete with tigers for prey. Deprived of food, tigers cannot survive, and 'their extinction means that the balance of the ecosystem is upset and this has a snowballing effect.'<sup>10</sup>

All over India, the management of parks has sharply posited the interests of poor tribals who have traditionally lived in them against those of wilderness lovers and urban pleasure seekers who wish to keep parks 'free of human interference' – that is, free of other humans. These conflicts are being played out in the Rajaji sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh, Simlipal in Orissa, Kanha in Madhya Pradesh, Melghat in Maharashtra and in numerous other locations.<sup>11</sup> In all these instances, Indian wildlifers have ganged up behind the Forest Department to evict the tribals and rehabilitate them far outside the forests. In this endeavour they have drawn sustenance from western biologists and conservation organizations, who have thrown the prestige of science and the power of the dollar behind their crusade.

**A** partisan of the tribal might answer Robinson and his ilk in various ways. He might note that tribals and tigers have co-existed for centuries; it is the demands of cities and factories that have of late put unbearable pressures on the forest, with species after species being put on the endangered list. Tribals are being made the scapegoats, while the real agents of forest destruction – poachers, planters, politicians, profiteers – escape notice. As

Robinson flies off to the next project on his list of 160, he might reflect on his own high-intensity lifestyle, which doubtless puts a greater stress on the world's resources than dozens, perhaps hundreds of forest tribals.

The tribal partisan might further point out that even as plans are afoot to evict the tribals from Nagarhole, Taj is being welcomed in to build its hotel. Meanwhile, the Forest Department has applied for American money to build seven patrol stations and a network of roads connecting them. This, it is claimed, is necessary for greater vigilance against poachers, when what it will in fact do is open out the forest still further to outside penetration. Our tribal partisan might argue, finally, that a policy which treats forest dwellers as enemies rather than partners can only be counter productive. What this policy will encourage, in time, is poachers and smugglers of ivory and sandalwood who can count on tribal acquiescence in the battle against the common enemy, the Forest Department.<sup>12</sup>

**A**ll this was stated more eloquently by the anthropologist Verrier Elwin. Writing in 1963, having made his home among the tribals and forests of India for some 30 years, Elwin deplored the 'constant propaganda that the tribal people are destroying the forest.' He asked pointedly how the tribals 'could destroy the forest. They owned no trucks; they hardly had even a bullock-cart; the utmost that they could carry away was some wood to keep them warm in the winter months, to reconstruct or repair their huts and carry on their little cottage industries.'

Who then was (and is) the real culprit? Elwin tells us of the 'feeling amongst the tribals that all the arguments in favour of preservation of forests are intended to refuse them their

[rights]. They argue that when it is a question of industry, township, development work or projects of rehabilitation, all these plausible arguments are forgotten and vast tracts are placed at the disposal of outsiders who mercilessly destroy the forest wealth with or without necessity.'<sup>13</sup>

#### IV

The main difference between Verrier Elwin's time and ours is the growing influence of wildlife fanatics. In the past, the tribal was expected to give way to the juggernaut of Development, so that his forest abode could be claimed by iron mines, steel plants, and large dams. That gospel is now joined by the gospel of Total Conservation, in which the interest of the tiger is always elevated above the interest of the tribal.

**T**hat Elwin reversed this order of priority is not unrelated to the fact that his discipline of social anthropology tends to place the concerns of humans, especially vulnerable humans, above all else (and all others). But these conflicts must not be reduced to a matter of which discipline privileges which species. More sociologically sensitive biologists, for instance, have warned of the dangers of neglecting, in programmes of wilderness and wildlife conservation, the rightful concerns of the communities who live in and around protected areas.

Let me quote from three such scientists, writing in 1949, 1977 and 1994 respectively. First, a statement from the botanist M.S. Randhawa, notable for its alertness to farmers' interests and also for its then conventional categorization of 'useful' and 'harmful' species:

'With the liquidation of the feudal order... the problem of wildlife preservation has acquired a new significance. Whatever may be the faults

of princes and rajahs, it must be said to their credit that they preserved the wild animals and forests of their states rather well. With the growing demands of cultivators who want to save their crops from harmful animals, there is need of clear formulation of policy. There is immediate need of initial survey of all proposed National Parks areas. While there is necessity of maintenance of good vegetational balance and preservation of rich flora and fauna in the National Park areas, the general wildlife policy must be such as will not prejudice the use of developed agricultural land. The interests of the cultivator and the lover of nature must be harmonized.

'The apprehensions of farmers that the National Parks and Nature Reserves will develop into uncontrolled sanctuaries where pests and weeds will be allowed to flourish, and which will spread into surrounding agricultural lands must be allayed. The biologist must give lists of harmful and useful birds and animals. While the friends of the cultivator should be encouraged in the National Parks, the enemies must be exterminated. The biologist should also give a finding whether campaigns should be started for the destruction of wild boars, porcupines, monkeys, bats and parrots who cause enormous damage to crops and gardens. Before any such campaigns are started, it should be ascertained whether wholesale destruction of certain birds or animals may not have harmful repercussions, on account of the upsetting of [the] balance of power between various organisms.'<sup>14</sup>

**T**he great ornithologist, Salim Ali, came straight to the point, without any recourse to a dubious division between good and bad species:

'No conservation laws or measures can succeed fully unless they

have the backing of informed public opinion, which in our case means the usually illiterate village cultivator. In other words, unless we can make the villager understand, and convince him of the logic in expecting him to preserve the tiger or leopard that has deprived him of maybe his sole worldly possession – the cow which moreover provided the meagre sustenance for himself and his family – how can we induct his willing cooperation? Similarly, how can we expect him to see any sense in being asked not to destroy the deer or pig that have ravaged the crops which he has toiled for months to raise, and on which all his hopes are banked? Admittedly this is going to be a very difficult task, but I believe it is not impossible if we could but find the right approach. We have never really tried enough. Devising a realistic strategy is now a challenge to all conservationists.<sup>15</sup>

**F**inally, some remarks of the ecologist Raman Sukumar, whose work on the Indian elephant has highlighted the conflicts – as manifest in incidents of man-slaughter and the destruction of crops – between large animals protected in parks and farmers who live on the periphery:

'It is both unrealistic and unjust to expect only a certain section of society, the marginal farmers and tribals, to bear the entire cost of predatory animals. We have to work towards ameliorating the impact of wildlife on people if conservation of wildlife and their habitats is to gain acceptance among such people who interact with these in their daily lives.... Today the local people see sanctuaries or national parks as simply the pleasure resorts of the affluent. There is urgent need to reorient management of our wildlife reserves so as to pass on economic benefits to local communities.... If an adequate

proportion of the income derived from tourism is retained by the local economy there would be increased motivation for people to value wildlife and their habitats.... It is time we take bold new approaches towards reconciling economic development with conservation.'

**W**ith regard to the elephant-human conflict in southern India, Sukumar has been more than forthcoming with 'bold new approaches'. He urges proper and just compensation for the loss of life (which varies, depending on the province, from a niggardly Rs 2000 to Rs 15,000) and for damage to crops. He also thinks that in some cases, trenches and electric fences might dissuade elephants and other large mammals into trespassing into habitations and fields. Most radically, he states that 'wildlife populations that come into severe conflict with human interests may have to be directly managed to keep their levels below tolerable limits.'

He goes on to explain what the euphemism 'directly managed' actually means:

'It is clear that the adult male elephants are inherently more predisposed to raiding crops as a consequence of social organization. The removal of an adult male elephant from the population would have a far greater effect in reducing crop damage (by a factor of 20 in economic terms) and saving human lives than the removal of an elephant from a family herd. Our understanding of demographic processes in such polygynous species also show that the loss of a certain proportion of males is not likely to affect the intrinsic rate of growth of the population. The removal of females from the population would certainly reduce its growth rate. Hence, the selective culling of male elephants

identified as inveterate crop raiders or rogues would be the best form of population management.'<sup>16</sup>

These recommendations are the outcome of years of careful and patient scientific work, yet they have been unable to find acceptance. For Salim Ali's hopes notwithstanding, most conservationists remain uninterested in working towards a 'realistic' strategy. Forest Departments will not pay proper compensation, claiming that it would open the floodgates to all kinds of rustics with all manner of forged claims. Other biologists, and wildlife lovers in general, will not countenance any talk of 'culling', on moral grounds – all life is sacred – or on instrumental ones – which species will we have to manage next?<sup>17</sup>

**M**eanwhile, the tension around national parks continues – angered by conservationists, public and private, villagers in Karnataka have aided the notorious sandalwood and elephant smuggler Veerappan, who at least takes better care of their stomachs. So elephants raid crops and take the occasional life, while Veerappan cheerfully eludes the thousands of security personnel who have tried to catch or kill him for a decade.

It is conflicts such as these which have led the more thoughtful Indian biologists to reject the notion that species and habitat protection can succeed only through the punitive guns-and-guards approach favoured by a majority of wildlife conservationists, both domestic and foreign. Some ecologists, like Raman Sukumar, have sought to resolve conflicts between large mammals and humans; others, like Madhav Gadgil, have tried to move biodiversity conservation away from a privileging of large mammals towards a more inclusive and decentralized approach that would also honour and revive traditional systems



of nature conservation such as sacred groves. Sociologists with rich field experience, such as Ashish Kothari, have pleaded for a more democratic system of park management in which the voices of local communities would ring out loud and clear.

**T**hese conservationists by no means wish to see a world completely dominated by cows, corn and those who raise them. They have time for the tiger and the rainforest, and also want to protect those islands of nature not yet fully conquered by humans. Their plea, however, is to recognize wilderness protection as a distinctively North Atlantic brand of environmentalism, whose export and expansion must be done with caution, care, and above all, with humility. In the poor and heavily populated countries of the South, protected areas cannot be managed with guns and guards but must, rather, take full cognizance of the rights of the people who have lived in (and oftentimes cared for) the forest long before it became a national park or a World Heritage Site.<sup>18</sup> As Raman Sukumar might put it, we need to save agriculture from elephants as much as protect elephants from men.

In addition, the present philosophy and practice of conservation is flawed in a scientific as much as a social sense.<sup>19</sup> National park management in much of the Third World is heavily imprinted by the American experience. In particular, it takes over two axioms of wilderness thinking: the monumentalist belief that wilderness has to be 'big, continuous wilderness' and the claim that *all* human intervention is bad for the retention of diversity. These axioms have led to the constitution of huge sanctuaries, each covering thousands of square miles, and a total ban on human ingress in the 'core' areas of national parks. At the same time, little or no

thought has been given to the conservation of diversity outside these strictly protected areas.

These axioms of 'giganticism' and 'hands off nature', though sometimes cloaked in the jargon of science, are simply prejudices. When it is realized that the preservation of *plant* diversity is possibly more important than the preservation of large mammals, a decentralized network with many small parks makes far greater sense. The network of sacred groves in India traditionally fulfilled some of these functions. Yet modern wilderness lovers are in general averse to reviving that system: apart from rationalist objections, they are in principle opposed to local control, instead preferring instead centralized land management. The belief in a total ban on human intervention is equally misguided. Studies show that the highest levels of biological diversity are often found in areas with some (though not excessive) intervention. In opening up new niches to be occupied by insects, plants and birds, partially disturbed ecosystems can have a greater diversity than untouched areas.

**T**he dogma of total protection can also have tragic consequences. In 1982, scientists forbade villagers from exercising traditional grazing rights in the Keoladeo Ghana bird sanctuary in Bharatpur – when villagers protested, police opened fire, killing several of them. When the ban was enforced in following years, the population of key bird species (e.g. waterfowl and the Siberian crane) actually declined. Grazing, by keeping down the tall grass, had helped these species forage for insects. Grazing was thus beneficial to the park, but the pill was too bitter to swallow and in subsequent years scientists have refused to lift the ban.<sup>20</sup>

## V

The present essay is a companion piece to a polemic published some years ago in the U.S. journal *Environmental Ethics*. That essay took apart the then hegemonic ideology among American environmentalists of 'deep ecology'. I argued that deep ecology's master distinction, anthropocentric/biocentric, was of little use in understanding the dynamics of environmental degradation in the real world. I had also shown that deep ecology's claims to be a philosophy of universal significance were spurious, made possible only by twisting the thought of non-western thinkers (Lao Tsu and Gandhi, for example) completely out of context. I had suggested, finally, that the noble, apparently disinterested, motives of deep ecologists fuelled a territorial ambition – the physical control of wilderness in parts of the world other than their own – which led inevitably to the displacement and harsh treatment of the human communities who dwelt in these forests.<sup>21</sup>

**S**urprisingly, the article evoked a variety of responses, both pro and con. The veteran Vermont radical, Murray Bookchin, engaged in a polemic with American deep ecologists, offered a short (three-line) letter of congratulation. A longer (30 page) response came from the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, the originator of the term 'deep ecology'. Naess felt bound to assume responsibility for the ideas I had challenged, even though I had distinguished between his emphases (more sympathetic to the poor) and those of his American interpreters and followers. Other correspondents, lesser known but no less engaged, wrote in to praise and to condemn.<sup>22</sup> Over the years, the essay has appeared in some half-a-dozen anthologies, as a voice of the 'Third World', the

token and disloyal opposition to the reigning orthodoxies of environmental ethics.

In the North American context mine was a rare dissenting voice, yet the arguments of my 1989 essay made perfect sense to many of my Indian colleagues – indeed, it could not have been written in the absence of conversations over the years with scientists such as Sukumar and Gadgil. Perhaps it attracted attention because it constituted one of the first attacks on a form of ‘trans-nationalism’ generally considered benign. After all, we are not talking here of the Marines, with their awesome firepower, or even of the World Bank, with its money power and the ability to manipulate developing country governments. These are men (and more rarely, women) who come preaching the equality of all species, who worship all that is good and beautiful in nature. What could be wrong with them?

**S**even years later, I see no reason to revise my characterization of deep ecology as ‘conservation imperialism’. The specious nonsense about equal rights of all species cannot hide the plain fact that green missionaries are possibly more dangerous, and certainly more hypocritical, than their economic or religious counterparts. The globalizing advertiser and banker works for a world in which everyone, regardless of class or colour, is in an economic sense an American – driving a car, drinking Pepsi, owning a fridge and a washing machine. The missionary, having discovered Christ, wants all pagans to share in the discovery. The conservationist wants to ‘protect the tiger (or whale) for posterity’, yet expects other people to make the sacrifice.

Moreover, the processes unleashed by green imperialism are well nigh irreversible. For the consumer

tillated into eating Kentucky Fried Chicken can always say, ‘once is enough’. The Hindu converted into Baptism can decide later on to revert to his original faith. But the tribal people, thrown out of their homes by the propaganda of the conservationist, are condemned to the life of an ecological refugee, a fate for many forest people which is next only to death. For the Chenchu hunter-gatherers who have been ‘asked’ to make way for a tiger reserve in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, the problem is that ‘they have to pay for the protection of tigers while no one pays for the conservation of their communities.’ As one Chenchu told a visitor from the state capital, ‘If you love tigers so much, why don’t you shift all of them to Hyderabad and declare that city a tiger reserve?’<sup>23</sup>

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1. Lee Merriam Talbot, ‘Wilderness Overseas’, *Sierra Club Bulletin*, volume 42, number 6, 1957.
2. These quotes are from a WWF poster on display at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale University, in the summer of 1989.
3. Daniel H. Janzen, ‘The Future of Tropical Ecology’, *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, volume 17, 1986, p. 307, emphasis added.
4. Hugh Iltis, ‘Whose Fight is the Fight for Nature’, *Sierra Club Bulletin*, volume 9, number 9, 1967, pp. 36-7, emphasis added.
5. Michael Soulé, *The Tigress and the Little Girl* (manuscript of forthcoming book), Chapter VI, ‘International Conservation Politics and Programs’.
6. Daniel H. Janzen, *Guanacaste National Park: Tropical Ecological and Cultural Restoration*. Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, San Jose, 1986. Also David Rains Wallace, ‘Communing in Costa Rica’, *Wilderness*, number 181, Summer 1988, which quotes Janzen as wishing to plan ‘protected areas in a way that will permanently accommodate solitude seeking humans as well as jaguars, tapirs, and sea turtles’. These solitude seeking humans might include biologists, backpackers, deep ecologists, but not, one supposes, indigenous farmers, hunters or fishermen.

7. Raymond Bonner, *At the Hand of Man: Peril and Hope for Africa's Wildlife*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1993, pp. 35, 65, 70, 85, 221.

8. E.N. Chidumayo, ‘Realities for Aspiring Young African Conservationists’, in Dale Lewis and Nick Carter (eds.), *Voices from Africa: Local Perspectives on Conservation*. World Wildlife Fund, Washington, 1993, p. 49.

9. Arne Kalland, ‘Seals, Whales and Elephants: Totem Animals and the Anti-Use Campaigns’, in *Proceedings of the Conference on Responsible Wildlife Management*. European Bureau for Conservation and Development, Brussels, 1994. Also the same author’s ‘Management by Totemization: Whale Symbolism and the Anti-Whaling Campaign’, *Arctic*, volume 46, number 2, 1993.

10. *The Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, 5 November 1995.

11. A useful country-wide overview is provided in Ashish Kothari, Saloni Suri, and Neena Singh, ‘Conservation in India: A New Direction’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 October 1995.

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13. Verrier Elwin, *A New Deal for Tribal India*. Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, 1963.

14. M.S. Randhawa, ‘Nature Conservation, National Parks and Bio-Aesthetic Planning in India’, Presidential Address. Section of Botany, pp. 87-103 in *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Indian Science Congress, Allahabad, 1949*.

15. Salim Ali, ‘Presidential Letter: Wildlife Conservation and the Cultivator’, *Hornbill*, April-June 1977.

16. R. Sukumar, ‘Wildlife-Human Conflict in India: An Ecological and Social Perspective’, in R. Guha (ed.) *Social Ecology*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994. The empirical research from which these recommendations flow is reported in Sukumar’s *The Asian Elephant: Ecology and Management*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; also the thesis on which the book is based: *Ecology of the Asian Elephant and its Interaction with Man in South India*. Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, 1985.

17. ‘Culling’ is contrary to the ideology of ‘deep ecology’ that provides philosophical cover to authoritarian biologists and conservationists. Another unfortunate case concerns the crocodiles raised on the Madras snake farm by Romulus Whitaker and his colleagues. They have successfully raised thousands of crocodiles in captivity – and now await permission

from the Government of India to harvest a species that they have convincingly demonstrated is no longer 'endangered'. Permission has not been forthcoming, despite the fact that it will generate substantial amounts of foreign exchange to the state (from the sale of leather bags and the like) and provide employment and income to the Irula tribals with whom the Snake Park works.

18. For thoughtful suggestions as to how the interests of wild species and the interests of poor humans might be made more compatible, see M. Gadgil and P.R.S. Rao, 'A System of Positive Incentives to Conserve Biodiversity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6 August 1994.

19. See Ramachandra Guha, 'The Two Phases of American Environmentalism: A Critical History', in Frederique Appel-Marglin and Stephen Marglin (eds.) *Decolonizing Knowledge: From Development to Discourse*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996.

20. In the famous Valley of Flowers, high up in the Himalaya, a ban on grazing has reportedly led to the local extinction of several species, for much the same reason.

21. Ramachandra Guha, 'Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique', *Environmental Ethics*, volume 11, number 1, Spring 1989.

22. I speak here of private communications; published responses to my essay include David M. Johns, 'The Relevance of Deep Ecology to the Third World: Some Preliminary Comments', *Environmental Ethics*, volume 12, number 2, 1990; J. Baird Callicott, 'The Wilderness Idea Revisited: the Sustainable Development Alternative', *The Environmental Professional*, volume 13, number 2, 1991.

23. K. Balagopal, 'A Little More of the Same', *Seminar* (New Delhi), issue 412, December 1993. Making the same point, albeit in more gentle language, are villagers in the Indonesian island of Timpaus. As reported by Harald Beyer Broch, 'Some islanders have heard that foreign organizations work for protection of crocodiles, and that they, succeed to the point that it is difficult to sell crocodiles in Indonesia today. Many of the present villagers said they would like these protectionists to live in villages where crocodiles are a threat, as they were in Timpaus some twenty years ago. That experience would probably have made them change their opinion. It might be easier to want to protect animals that you never encounter, than those that may eat you next day'. Harald Beyer Broch, 'Local Resource Dependency and Utilization: Environmental Issues as seen from Timpaus, Indonesia', paper presented at the Workshop on Environmental Movements in Asia, Leiden, 27-29 October 1994.

# Sacred groves for the 21st century

K. ULLAS KARANTH

INDIA has now seriously grappled with contentious problems of conserving its wildlife for over a half century, with a marked intensification of the effort in the second half of this period. This effort has been made against a backdrop of a massive population increase, rise in democratic aspirations and burgeoning consumer needs and greed, all of which fuelled a rapidly developing economy. Yet, against all odds, India has managed to hang on to, however precariously, several intact faunal assemblages of highly extinction-prone large vertebrates within the confines of its protected areas that cover only 4% of its landmass.

Compared to the virtual elimination or large scale range restrictions of large vertebrate faunas of North America, Europe and China, which accompanied comparable periods of demographic and economic growth, this is not a small achievement. This half-century of rich empirical experience in conserving wildlife in India is strewn with both successes and failures. India's success in holding on to species such as the rhino, elephant and tiger is quite spectacular when compared to the record of other Asian countries (with the possible exception of Nepal), which have undergone similar social transitions. However, major failures have also marred this conservation effort. The inability to manage wildlife scientifically, and limited by an official mind-set too rigid

to deal with issues affecting local people, are two glaring examples.

We have to analyze the problem of 'wildlife conservation' against the above background of empirical experience and ecological evidence. I would argue that, for this debate to progress beyond the usual sterile polemics of 'wildlife versus people', the terms 'wildlife' and 'conservation' have to be defined a little more rigorously. I approach this task by eliminating some of the definitions which muddy rather than clarify the essence of the problem.

**A** recent study (Madhusudan and Karanth, unpublished) in the Kudremukh National Park area showed widespread local hunting and collection of forest products, as causing severe depression of densities of large mammals and in the quality of their habitats. However, another study that focused on general biodiversity at the same site (but was thereby forced to use less rigorous methods, in our opinion) suggested that biodiversity levels were quite high and holding out well. Both studies concurred that logging in the past had made the forest structure less 'pristine'. However, because the second study did not attempt to collect any quantitative data on large mammal species more vulnerable to human disturbance, it failed to identify their serious population declines or their causal factors.

I believe the central debate here should not be about saving overall biodiversity, which includes all living creatures ranging from soil organisms to cultivated plants, and is measured by scientists through parameters such as species richness or diversity indices. Most forms of biodiversity (e.g. soil bacteria, fungi, crops, crows, rats, jackals) can survive on intensively human dominated landscapes such as cities, towns and farmlands. Several other forms of biodiversity may need

more natural landscapes to survive, but can still withstand intensive disturbances or even extractive practices (several forest trees, birds, reptiles, smaller mammals, wild pigs).

I exclude such organisms from the scope of this essay because, obviously, there are no major contentious issues about adversities imposed by human society when we deal with their conservation. In fact, most such biodiversity is likely to survive without any effort on our part or even because of our single-minded pursuit of better lifestyles and profits (gene banks, cloning, genetic engineering and so on). Therefore, I will focus here only on the conservation of a subset of this broader biodiversity, which can be termed 'wildlife'. Thus defined, 'wildlife conservation' becomes largely (but not exclusively) an issue of preserving viable populations, communities and landscapes of free ranging, extinction-prone, larger vertebrates (e.g., rhino, tiger, elephant, liontailed monkey, great hornbill, great Indian bustard).

**T**he term conservation as traditionally defined includes activities such as preservation (as in protected areas), sustainable harvesting (as in fisheries), and control or regulation of organisms harmful to human interests (as in the case of man-eating tigers or crop-raiding elephants). I broadly follow this definition, but with a thrust on discussing issues related to wildlife preservation. The term wildlife conservation here does not include concepts such as animal rights and *ahimsa*, which are moral and social issues beyond the scope of this essay.

Having defined wildlife conservation specifically in these terms, I will readily concede a point around which there is a surfeit of polemics in India. Many forms of biodiversity can and do coexist with human exploita-

tion of their habitats. Some forms may even be capable of surviving higher pressures of the future. These forms of biodiversity do not need inviolate sacred groves (of whatever size) to survive in. Further, I specifically discuss wildlife preservation in the Indian context of rising human and livestock population densities. I do so against a backdrop of increasing aspirations for material consumption levels among all social strata (including rural poor and tribals), and the burgeoning commercial markets for an increasing array of products from wildlife and wildlife habitats, in a growth-friendly economic climate.

**W**hat are the inherent characteristics of wildlife species or communities which render them vulnerable to extinctions? Several biological traits, which we simply cannot alter through progressive legislation or dedicated social activism, are clearly recognizable. Body size and diet are two such traits. Large body size is linked to greater dietary needs and hence to large home ranges and landscape level movements, even for herbivorous species such as elephants, whose food may be relatively abundant. As elephants move across large landscapes, they are attracted to raid agricultural crops, even when natural forage is abundant. Where natural forage is depleted by livestock grazing, bamboo extraction or annual man-induced forest fires, the problem of the elephant's conflict with agriculture becomes even more acute.

A carnivorous diet further accentuates this need for wide ranging behaviour among large vertebrates. To survive and reproduce, a single tiger may need a prey base of about 400 deer sized animals. A home range supporting such a prey base may extend over 15 to 500 square kilometers, depending on prey density. A

tigress raising cubs has to kill 60-70 prey animals in a year. Even if there is wild prey, she will kill cattle if she can. Where the wild prey base is depleted, she will prey exclusively on cattle, and occasionally humans.

**S**uch landscape creatures, therefore, live at relatively low densities. Social spacing behaviours such as territoriality, dispersal and seasonal migrations further accentuate their need for landscape level movements. For ensuring the survival of reproducing and viable populations (even using the more easily attained demographic criteria rather than the more demanding genetic criteria) of such species, relatively extensive landscapes are needed. Demographic models of tiger populations (Karanth and Stith, in press) show that a demographically viable, but small population of 24 breeding tigresses, would need a protected area of 400-4000 square kilometers, depending on prey density. Therefore, traditional conservation areas such as sacred groves are not big enough to hold tiger populations, nor can temple ponds sustain sea turtle populations. If these creatures are to survive the 21st century we need larger 'sacred groves'.

When such necessary large landscape matrices are embedded with attractive sources of food and water, such as agricultural crops or livestock populations, severe conflict between wildlife and humans becomes inevitable. In India, the extirpation of the cheetah and the near extirpation of the wolf, the restricted distribution of breeding populations of tiger and lions to less than 0.5% of their former distributional range, show clearly that their coexistence with humans has cost them dearly. Elimination of the elephant from extensive forested areas which are honey-combed with agricultural

enclaves, such as in Uttara Kannada district with 80% forest cover, shows that, ultimately, when human-wildlife conflict becomes inevitable, human interests will clearly prevail.

Not all such extinction-prone species are large, wide-ranging or carnivorous. Many occupy narrowly defined ecological niches. The lion tailed macaques and great hornbills of the Western Ghats have critical needs for food obtained from rainforest trees or lianas, and they shelter in old-growth tall timber. If their habitats are to be exploited intensively for timber or forest products such as fruits, nuts, roots, bark, resins, climbers or canes, they cannot survive in these habitats anymore. Such niche specialist wildlife species cannot shift their ranges elsewhere to make room for the needs of industries such as tanning, dyeing, *agarbatti*, food processing, timber or dairying which are dismantling components of their habitats, piecemeal, to cater to expanding local, regional, and global markets. While exploitation of timber is at least recognized by conservationists as a factor generally inimical to wildlife conservation, the equally severe pressures resulting from livestock grazing and from the extraction of other forest products for meeting the needs of an urban industrial market, are barely recognized as threats by most conservationists or social activists.

**T**he fact that India's rural poor or tribals are commonly hired as cheap labour to exploit forest products which end up in distant markets, is often mistaken for an ecologically sensible, traditionally wise, harmonious coexistence of wildlife and local communities. The argument that the collection of *tendu* leaves to feed the *beedi* industry of Mangalore or *sal* seeds for making hydrogenated fats in Mumbai, or cinnamon bark for the export-led growth of

*agarbatti* industry in Mysore, are all 'traditional' practices of wise use, simply ignores any critical ecological or historical analysis.

There is no doubt that the issue of cash income needs, which drive rural poor in India to such wage labour, must be addressed squarely on its own. This is best done without confounding the wildlife conservation issues with the livelihood rights issues. An overdose of market friendly humanism of this sort is not a substitute for site-specific ecological analysis of the real impact of such human induced, market-driven disturbances on wildlife communities.

**T**here is no evidence, *prima facie*, that the ecology of many endangered wildlife species, communities and habitats have evolved an evolutionarily adaptive relationship to such market-driven pressures. While it is true that some levels of disturbance regimes exist in nature, and sometimes human activities have formed a part of such disturbance regimes, there is no data to argue that all human induced disturbance, at all intensities, regardless of origins, is beneficial to wildlife.

Increasingly, many wildlife species themselves have become targets for direct exploitation for meat and body parts. The hunting of animals also occurs to eliminate crop raiding, cattle killing or man-killing. Hunting often results from a need for luxury consumption or supply to the local market. Very rarely is it for true subsistence in India, as it is, for example, in the case of rainforest pygmies of central Africa. There exists massive evidence that most of the hunting in tropical forests all over the world is unsustainable (Kramer et al. 1997; Robinson and Bennett, in press).

Even under potentially favourable factors such as low human population densities and extensive wilderness areas in Central Africa,

hunting by pygmies seems to be turning unsustainable. The combination of traditional fieldcraft with modern hunting accessories (guns, explosives, torch lights) or even simple technological advances in metallurgy (such as use of wire cables for snares or use of steel and springs for traps), impose pressures on many species which evolution has not equipped them to cope with. When external markets are linked to such situations, wildlife declines become precipitous.

**I**n India there is not a single site where it can be shown that unregulated hunting does not lead to virtual extirpation of wildlife. This point is particularly well illustrated by the state of wildlife in the Northeast Indian hill states and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In both these places wildlife has been extirpated over extensive areas of community owned forests, despite there being in place strong traditional structures of authority and resource management. In Northeastern India, a short list of widely distributed species driven to extinction by hunting entirely or over most of their ranges during the last two centuries includes: Javan, Sumatran and Indian rhinos, barasingha and brow-antlered deer, takin, wild-water buffalo, Malay sun-bear and the Gangetic dolphin. Not surprisingly, all these are large bodied vertebrates.

Apparently, the altered human demographics, improved technologies and increasing market penetration have made traditional hunting of these species unsustainable. Therefore, at this point in time 'sustainable' hunting in itself, whether regulated by a local or distant authority, does not seem to offer much scope for wildlife conservation in India. When biologists argue in favour of such incentive driven hunting practices to encourage local communities to conserve wild-

life, based on the African or American experiences, they seem to ignore Indian realities – just as social scientists tend to, when they advocate unhindered forest product collection by locals.

Therefore, in the face of substantial evidence to the contrary, one must be cautious while extrapolating the relevance of examples of coexistence of humans and wildlife from other ecologically and socially dissimilar contexts to India. We simply cannot extrapolate from examples of the low-density populations in the Amazon rainforest living off wild meat to rainforests of the Western Ghats. We know that hunting in rainforests of Asia has virtually extirpated large mammals because of higher human population densities, better technologies and greater market connectivity.

**W**e cannot assume, because the Masai herders in Africa coexist with large carnivores in landscapes over several thousand square kilometers, such coexistence is a feasible option inside wildlife reserves of a few hundred square kilometer area. We cannot ignore the fact that Maasai reduce livestock losses to predators to tolerable levels by hunting to depress densities of lions and hyenas. While the poor quality land on which Maasai graze their cattle has few other uses in their context, the forests of India can have many profitable uses than preserving either wildlife or rural grazers. We also need to note that in the African context such multiple use areas *exist outside of, and in addition to* large and strictly protected preserves with which they often have source-sink relationships.

The Maldhari herders of Gir are sometimes presumed to coexist harmoniously with lions, because they traditionally tolerated some livestock

losses to lions. Yet, with the relocation of Maldhari herders from parts of Gir, the abundance of wild ungulates and their contribution to lion diet, both increased. The simple predator-prey system comprising of lions and domestic buffaloes turned into, arguably, a more 'natural' multiple prey-predator system. I would argue that the latter should be the goal of wildlife conservation, in a social and biological context where intact lion-ungulate communities occupy probably less than 0.1% of their former distributional range. If the conservation goal were to merely have lions living off domestic water buffalo (a species as exotic to Gir as Eucalyptus trees), one could conceivably argue in favour of raising captive lions on buffalo meat at a fraction of the social cost of trying to preserve remnant pieces of the Girecosystem.

There is no doubt that conservation decisions result from a partly political process driven by social pressures. My point here is that this process should also incorporate substantial knowledge about biological needs of wildlife, and not merely about the human needs and aspirations. With the early biocentric preservationism having yielded ground to the user-friendly and market friendly conservation paradigm of 'sustainable use' over the last two decades, starting with the platitudinous World Conservation Strategy, we need to re-survey the ground we have covered.

**T**o flip the other side of an argument tossed up a few years ago, we now need conservation not only as if people mattered but also as if large animals mattered. To describe such arguments in favour of incorporating of specific biological knowledge into the formulation of wildlife conservation policies, merely as manifestations of whimsical 'authoritarianism' on the part of socially insensitive wildlife

scientists seems rather naïve. A social scientist would be horrified if a biologist were to state that because Bishnois of Rajasthan do not eat antelopes, the Inuit of the Arctic or the Dayaks of Sarawak could also live as vegetarians. Unfortunately, it is precisely such dataless, free-wheeling extrapolation which appears to underlie most articulations about the feasibility of peaceful, perpetual – and allegedly traditional – coexistence between human societies and extinction-prone wildlife species.

Given that biological knowledge is necessary for practicing wildlife conservation, a related issue is the distinction often made between the local community's wildlife knowledge versus external, 'authoritarian' scientific knowledge. While the former is supposed to envision multiple, holistic pathways to wise use and coexistence with wildlife, the latter type of knowledge is presumed to be linear and inflexibly driven by scientific arrogance. I believe this presumed dichotomy is often in the minds of the inexperienced or untrained observers who pronounce such judgments, rather than based on any reality.

It is common experience to many of us biologists who have put some time in the field that interpretation of a field observation made by a good wildlife scientist and a native expert usually converge. The problem of dichotomous perception on what causes a phenomenon observed in the field usually emerges when the knowledge of the arrogant 'outsider' is solely derived from books and/or when assertion of the wise 'native' is driven by an externally tutored response to justify a current resource use practice. How many people know that the famous speech of the Red Indian Chief, which extols the traditional harmony between Amerindians and

mother earth, was actually drafted by a Seattle lawyer? Time and again, over the last two decades, when I tested my perception of the causes underlying negative factors affecting wildlife in field situations against those of an experienced but uninvolved local villager or tribesman, we usually agreed.

During a recently concluded study around Nagarahole (Madhusudan and Karanth in Robinson and Bennet, in press) our line transect survey data showed substantial differences in densities of large ungulates between two sites. One site was rigidly protected from local hunters while the other was less well protected. Our perception that this difference was largely due to greater access and less rigid enforcement of anti-hunting measures in the second site, was soon confirmed by a questionnaire survey of several local informants including neutral villagers and even illegal hunters themselves. When questioned in a non-ideological context, unrelated to their immediate needs, both neutral observers and the poachers themselves agreed that local hunting was the most important cause of depressed animal densities. Yet most of the literature pertaining to the issue of wildlife conservation generated by social activists in India, fails to point out this widely prevalent ground reality.

While rigorous scientific studies may be needed to 'prove' such hypotheses in a peer-reviewed ecological journal, the driving forces behind wildlife declines over most parts of India are usually apparent to any knowledgeable, experienced observer. To perceive basic reasons for such declines, all that the observer has to do is, at least for a moment, deconstruct intellectual predilections such as 'local communities do not damage their environments' or 'Indian foresters scientifically harvest timber.'

Let us agree for a moment that it is socially desirable to save a small subset of biodiversity, which I have defined as wildlife earlier. Let us be aware that this goal is achievable for a few wildlife species through establishment of gene-banks or zoos, with practically no attendant costs in terms of social conflicts which we are facing now. In fact, wildlife authorities in many Southeast Asian countries, in practice, basically focus their entire energies on such *ex-situ* measures, helping species like the Sumatran rhino to head towards extinction. The power of the international captive-breeding lobby among Third World wildlife managers stems from its magical ability to project glitzy technowizardry of *ex-situ* solutions as a substitute for the messy and hated job of on-ground protective tasks.

However, let us say we really want to save wildlife species *in situ*, with all ecological relationships and processes which sustain their populations, biological communities and landscapes which harbour them. If we so decide, there is no escape from having protected areas which are relatively free from commercial market pressures, and excessive human induced disturbance. The future challenge lies in setting up regulatory mechanisms, which can realistically work to reduce pressures and disturbances.

I am not talking here of fine-tuned wildlife management measures, such as deliberate setting-back of forest succession, use of fire to promote grazing by ungulates or establishing connectivity through new corridors. I am talking of the more basic need to regulate removal of plant biomass and hunting which often leads to conflicts between managing authorities and local communities. If we are to have relatively inviolate wildlife protected areas in the future, with acceptable

levels of social conflict around them (assuming, for the moment, that conflict-free society is still a distant dream), the following components may become necessary ingredients of any wildlife conservation policy.

**A**t present the designated protected areas which are relatively intact and have *de facto* protection probably comprise less than 1% of India's area. (I would exclude major national parks such as Namdapha, Nagarjuna Sagar and Manas from my category of *de facto* protected areas). Clearly, this minute fraction has to be maintained and, if possible, increased. Where and how this should be done – and can be done – are issues open to debate. But the process has to be based on site-specific data. It is clear that wherever such protected areas survive, they will be accessible to an equally small fraction of the local communities of India. Most local communities (urban, semi-urban and rural) in India, who even now manage to survive without such proximity to protected areas, will continue to do so in the future.

Although ideally the state and its regulatory arms should ultimately wither away and all their social policing functions replaced by incentive-driven or voluntary changes in human behaviour, at this point in our history, the use of force to protect wildlife has to be acknowledged as a fundamental need. How best to minimize this need and how best we can combine it with the practice of participatory democracy and upholding of human rights, are still evolving issues.

Even in the few successful examples of extractive joint forest management such as those of West Bengal, there exists a local authority which punishes those who break the law. In extreme situations such as that of Kaziranga, which is a 500 square kilometer natural enclave

under immense threat from hardcore rhino poachers, a protective force of 200 men patrolling round the clock is needed. Whether such protective forces work better under a localized authority or under the government's control is an issue which needs to be explored in a site-specific context.

We also need to recognize the fact that if only local needs of biomass not driven by market forces are considered, management of outside landscapes to cater to just these needs can occur under state sponsorship (social forestry) or NGO sponsored technocratic interventions (Ranthambhore Foundation in India, WWF-USA in Nepal). On a larger scale, such landscape management which is complementary to wildlife conservation goals, can occur only under the force of economics. On the eastern boundaries of Nagarhole National Park, annual crops are grown. There is heavy pressure on the forests to graze livestock which produce draft power and dung, as well as for collecting firewood, small timber and bamboo for local use and sale in markets. Regulatory measures here come into conflict with a relatively large fraction of the local population engaged in wood cutting and grazing. Regulation turns into a 'law and order' problem, a common scene around many protected areas of India.

**O**n the western boundaries of Nagarhole, where the land is under coffee cultivation, the reduced dependence on livestock, production of woody biomass in the plantations and almost guaranteed conditions of full employment at relatively high wages have combined to virtually eliminate such biomass pressures on forests. The regulatory application of force in this case becomes easier, and locally acceptable, because it is specifically targeted only at a small fraction of the

local population involved in illegal hunting or smuggling of valuable timber or non-timber forest products. This is somewhat similar to the situation which prevails around Kaziranga where most genuine local needs of substance biomass and employment are met from productive agriculture and tea plantations. The protective force therefore concentrates almost exclusively on dealing with illegal hunters.

**C**onservation options are, in the final analysis, political options. Scientific, moral, aesthetic and pragmatic arguments have been advanced to show that sacrificing the remaining 3% or so area under wildlife reserves is unlikely to make any dent on human problems, which we have been unable to solve by using and abusing the remaining 97% of the land area. Do we just assume that political representatives of local communities do not understand this? Conservationists need to use all their persuasive powers and arguments to convince them. These are powerful arguments ranging all the way from traditional tolerance of rights of other creatures to the 21st century needs of biotechnology for human welfare. Coupled with proper economic incentives and deployment of an adequate deterrent force, sometimes we may even succeed.

Endangered wildlife species and their habitats are coming under increasing pressure from a variety of social forces: consumer, urban and industrial interests who benefit from 'mining' the wildlife habitats for minerals, water, power, forest products, and even recreational use; Local communities whose hunger for the land, employment and forest products keeps increasing; An articulate, humanitarian, urban middle-class constantly fuelling its own numerical growth in both the government and



NGO sectors. The path of least resistance against all these pressures has converged on wildlife protected areas in the form of a conservation model which advocates market-driven resource exploitation linked to increased local people's access into wildlife protected areas. This model is envisaged to work under the oversight of a massive developmental bureaucracy which administers the protected areas and surrounding landscapes, without any use of force.

Somehow we seem to hope that natural animal communities and their intricate interactions have the evolutionary adaptations and resilience to survive this onslaught of market-driven humanism. I believe there is neither empirical evidence nor ecological data justifying the acceptance of this user-friendly model of wildlife conservation. Clearly the paradigm of sustainable use everywhere has outlived its practical utility, as did the earlier one of state controlled authoritarian preservationism. I believe that the alternative concept of 'sustainable landscapes' advocated by Robinson (1993), in combination with the ideas of the emerging discipline of ecological economics, may provide useful tools for protecting the sacred groves in which our wildlife has to survive into the 21st century.

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## One size does not fit all

RENEE M. BORGES

ULTIMATELY it all distills down to size – size of population, body size, size of breeding territory, size of herd, size of forest, size of water body, size of data. ... And of course, size is inextricably linked with shapes – shapes of population distributions, shapes of breeding territories – are they regularly and densely packed or are they amoeboid because of the shape of the food resource distribution or of areas for sexual display, shapes of data – are there lots of good data sets and a few poor or are there equal numbers of good and poor data sets – are the data only available for one size class, let's say, the large forests and none for the other? All sizes have shapes – actual physical shapes, or shapes formed by the pattern of distribution of the data.

In this article, I make a plea for a greater emphasis on the actual physical sizes and shapes of protected areas because this holds the key to sound management practices. A management practice for one size does not fit all. I develop this argument and its relevance to the people versus protected area debate against the backdrop of the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra.

Let us meander into this sanctuary by way of the Bhima which originates at Bhimashankar. The Bhima joins the Krishna, so in a sense the Krishna originates at Bhimashankar. The Ghod also originates here within a tiny sacred grove of the village Ahupe at the northern end of the sanctuary and subsequently also joins the Bhima. The *Jyotirlingam* temple near the Bhima's origin is a major site of Shiva worship. Abutting the temple is what used to be a sacred grove, a remnant patch of evergreen seasonal cloud forest at the crest of the Western Ghats, less than 100 ha in size and connected to some forest remnants, each only 1-10 sq km in extent. Within the sanctuary, which is only 130 sq km, less than half of this is 'forest' which in these small fragments is interspersed with slash-and-burn agriculture, hill paddy fields, steep bare rock surfaces and grassy expanses strewn with boulders.

**P**art of the sanctuary drops down over the crest into west-facing teak forests. I will not deal with this part except to say that these forests serve as a refuge for crest birds and other species during the fog-bound monsoon at the crest. A small protected area with still smaller forest patches in a highly fragmented landscape. Think small. Do not think of expanses of grassy meadows or forests in Kanha National Park or the conglomerate of Bandipur, Mudumalai, Nagarhole and Wynaad. Think small; very, very small. Think of nine villages within this landscape, a total population of about 3000 people and 5000 free grazing livestock when counted in 1992.<sup>1,2</sup> Now think of shape—shape of the sanctuary which has a longer north-south axis than an east-west axis, in an area where the rivers run from west to east.

Home in onto any of the forest patches—often there is an abrupt tran-

sition as if a tree surgeon or tree barber had shaped this landscape—grass/rock/paddy fields/slash and burn on one side and forest on the other. Home in onto the rivers—there is riverine forest for only a short distance (5-10 km) from their origin, then the river banks are devoid of vegetation.

**L**et's now go to the Bhimashankar temple which receives more than 3,00,000 pilgrims annually,<sup>1</sup> many of these in the Hindu month of *Shravan*, and one huge pulse during *Mahashivratri* after which the water sources near the temple are ruined until the rains come. Bhimashankar is also a tourist attraction and about 2500 resident tourists (those staying for at least one night) were recorded in 1991.<sup>1</sup> These numbers may have increased considerably since then, especially as the other so-called hill resorts like Lonavala and Khandala nearby have virtually become over-developed weekend suburbs of Mumbai.

The so-called sacred grove adjacent to the temple harbours the first courses of the Bhima and is the finest and most diverse forest patch at Bhimashankar. It is primarily here that we have studied the giant squirrel and the plants it is specifically associated with, besides other species. The squirrel population in this grove has declined by 30% between 1985 and 1995.<sup>3</sup> This would put the local population into IUCN's vulnerable category—a population with a high risk of extinction in the medium-term. Since giant squirrels are canopy specialists, herbivorous, and as they are not hunted in this forest patch (evidenced by their lack of shyness), it is reasonably certain that this decline is a consequence of diminishing resources. This view is further supported by the fact that the home range size of individual squirrels has doubled in the 10 year period.<sup>3</sup>

I mentioned that the once sacred grove is sacred no more. Firewood is regularly collected from this grove—especially by people of a village called Bhorgiri, about 8 km away. It is then sold to commercial eating and lodging houses that have mushroomed near the temple because of the pilgrim and tourist trade. Admittedly this pressure is less in recent years because of a kerosene depot in the village and official insistence on the commercial use of this fuel. Firewood from here and surrounding forests is also stocked up for the monsoon by people of the Bhimashankar village attached to the temple.

**B**esides firewood, timber is also extracted for varied consumption. Another extracted commodity consists of the treelets of *Diospyros sylvatica* and *Garcinia talbotii*. This is for the construction of temporary stalls selling temple offerings and small trinkets to visitors and is mostly done by the younger generation of tribals, 15-25 year-olds who have finished school (usually not more than the 9th grade) and for whom this is a way of obtaining cash. These trees are especially targeted because they have straight poles even at the sapling stage. Their extraction is a concern because these are dioecious species in which males and females are separate, the recorded sex ratios in this population are heavily skewed towards the males and these species are also important in the giant squirrel diet.<sup>3</sup>

There is another problem with this grove. Since the Bhimashankar grove is the prime forest patch, giant squirrels from other areas where the fragments are getting smaller, attempt to enter it. This has caused serious crowding of squirrels at the edge of the patch and has led to an increase in aggression and to a breakdown of territoriality in the edge areas.

The Bhimashankar sacred grove also contains many endangered species of trees endemic to the Western Ghats like the *Diospyros* and *Garcinia* mentioned earlier. Some of these are represented by only a few adult individuals within the patch and are likely to remain as relics till their life span is over. When we looked at a few plant-pollinator mutualisms we found one tree *Heterophragma quadriloculare* (locally called *varas*) to be obligately pollinated at night by a species of carpenter bee.<sup>3</sup> Carpenter bees nest in dry wood; therefore dry wood, especially that containing carpenter bee nests, needs protection – particularly in a low productivity cloud forest site.<sup>4</sup>

**A**nother shrub *Lasiophan eriocephalus* (locally called *rameta*) was found to be obligately pollinated by a small species of beetle. Although this plant is self-compatible, the beetles are needed for pollen transfer within flowers. Moreover, we found that plants in clumps produced more fruit than isolated plants. The beetles are attracted in larger numbers to clumped resources. The pattern strikes again! In another dioecious *Diospyros* species, we found that males in one population did not flower at all one year, while males in other populations several fragments away were in bloom. Consequently, females did not set fruit in our study population that year. Had there been an intervening male population, the pollinators which are generalist insects, could have transferred pollen to our females. Here again, isolation and the small population size made a significant difference to plant fecundity.<sup>3</sup>

Forest resource management practices usually take the total tree resource stock into account. Our studies have shown that even in the most common tree species, wild mango and *Memecylon umbellatum* (locally

called *karap*), there is variation between individuals in resource quality, that is in the chemical composition of the bark, leaves or fruit. Only a few individual trees of these dominant species are used by giant squirrels for feeding; squirrels even cross territorial boundaries to feed on these preferred trees.<sup>3</sup> In management terms it means that the small resource base is actually even smaller.

**T**he traditional local inhabitants are mainly Hindu Madhao Kolis. They have a subsistence economy which until recently was still solely based on barter. Most families are below the poverty level.<sup>1</sup> They grow rice, finger millet and oil seeds. The major non-timber forest products are the fruit of *Terminalia chebula* (locally called *hirda*) which is sold to the tanning industry, the pods of *Aca-cia concinna* (locally called *shikakai*), and honey.

Currently, there is a crisis of traditional values at Bhimashankar – just as there is all over the world. A restless younger generation, brought up on the dubious fare available on pirated videocassettes and Doordarshan (there is at least one television set in each village, and the videocassette player is shared between villages), and which is exposed to urban prototypes in the form of pilgrims and tourists, shows little inclination for the older traditions. Most families have at least one member working outside the area, usually in a factory or doing manual labour in Pune or Mumbai. A part of the earnings trickle back to Bhimashankar. Still others work as road labour for the PWD or as casual labour with the Forest Department. The villagers in and around the Bhimashankar temple derive most of their income from temple-related activities. It is therefore not a completely insular economy.

The temple has attracted migrants who have settled in Bhimashankar. They could be classified as opportunistic resource consumers who have not evolved with the system. Similarly there is a powerful tomato and grape lobby which functions in the eastern plains, 60 km from Bhimashankar, but still draws upon the resources from Bhimashankar, often illegally. These resources, in the form of stakes which are needed for growing tomato and grape plants, and the stems of *Carvia callosa* (locally called *karvi*), a semelparous plant which flowers once in seven years and then dies like the bamboo, are its target. Some villagers augment their cash flow by teaming up with this lobby. The role of *Carvia* in this ecosystem has not been specifically studied, but it acts as a soil binder and grows even on the most rocky and steep slopes. After several years of runaway resource extraction leading to resource depletion, a species related to *karvi* is now the new target. The attractiveness of short term gains is undeniable. That is how timber contractors persuaded the villagers of Ahupe to sell their sacred grove. Fortunately a local NGO intervened, and the grove still exists.

**C**urrently, there is furious debate on the participation of people in forest management, especially about their role in protected areas. Can the lessons from Bhimashankar contribute to this debate and how? I think that this issue is particularly germane to Bhimashankar, especially given its small size. Models of resource utilisation have demonstrated that if a certain portion of the resource is kept inviolate and unextracted within a refugium, it would ensure continued viability of resource extraction from nearby extracted areas as restocking from the refugium could occur.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, spatial refugia in which

resources within certain spatial boundaries are protected were found to be more effective than temporal refugia in which resources are only protected during certain times, e.g. closed hunting seasons.<sup>5</sup> The refugium concept is even more valid for a small resource catchment area like Bhimashankar.

**T**raditional extraction practices that have continued in a sustained manner over several generations have been witnessed in several societies, especially those existing in small, territorial groups in stable, productive environments. In such cases, it is widely believed that the extraction levels were arrived at via trial and error over long time periods.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, many examples of failed, not so judicious extractions and environmentally destructive practices have been recorded even within such closed societies.<sup>6</sup> It is believed that an optimal harvesting strategy could be derived only if the consumers held the harvesting effort steady for several years and then compared it to harvest with effort at the end of one or more earlier periods of constant harvesting effort.<sup>5</sup>

However, this is virtually impossible to do in the real world, and people often do not have complete information about the relationship between harvest and effort. They use simple thumb rules which may or may not succeed in providing a sustainable harvest and may even result in the decimation of the resource.<sup>5</sup>

Analysing prudence versus profligacy, Berkes<sup>7</sup> and Gadgil<sup>8</sup> have concluded that prudent use of resources is possible only by so-called ecosystem people who are closely dependent on the resources immediately being produced within their surroundings within a definable catchment from which they can obtain feedback about resource status by trial and

error harvesting regimes. On the other hand, biosphere people, who can draw resources from areas distant from their habitation, tend to be profligate about resource use as resources exhausted from one area can be replenished from other quite distant areas. This also usually involves cash exchanges. Ecosystem people can derive management regimes for utilising common property or communally-controlled resources and can avert the tragedy of the commons. This, however, applies only to those resources that the ecosystem people have 'evolved' with and whose resource regeneration patterns, relative to certain normal levels of exploitation, they understand.

**A** classic example of the tragedy of the commons from Bhimashankar is the exploitation of moss from the tree trunks of the seasonal cloud forest. Moss was a resource that the ecosystem people had earlier never exploited commercially. They would use moss, along with a fern species, only to thatch their dwellings once a year prior to the monsoon: a low level of exploitation that did not need controls. In the 1980s, even prior to the declaration of the sanctuary, when horticultural concerns in Rahuri, about 200 km away, offered handsome prices for moss from Bhimashankar, many tribals competed with each other to exploit this open-access resource and in a couple of years the moss was exhausted.<sup>1</sup>

A Forest Department ban was effected as soon as this was reported but it was already too late. Along with the moss went the orchids, the fern and other members of the epiphyte community of the seasonal cloud forests of Bhimashankar. Even after a decade, the moss has not returned. Besides the accompanying species loss, the moss community of cloud forests contributes to drawing moisture from the low

clouds, thus playing an important role in hydrological cycles.<sup>4</sup> The significance of this in the Bhima-Krishna catchment is obvious.

Migrant traders, tourists, pilgrims, and commercial lobbies pose a significant threat to the longevity of the resource base of this ecosystem and its ecosystem people. These are opportunists and will move either to new livelihoods or to other areas once this area has been despoiled (traders, lobbies, tourists), or will bring in the resources with them (traders, organised bus tours for pilgrims). Who cares then if the resources at Bhimashankar are depleted?

The people mosaic at Bhimashankar therefore consists of ecosystem people, biosphere people and people in between these extremes. Its resources are in a leaky system and consequently so much more vulnerable, more challenging, more difficult to manage. A resource management system assuming only ecosystem people would certainly fail.

**W**hat has all of this to do with size, and where do we go from here? Let us take the ecosystem first, exclusive of humans. There are many things we do not know about the system. We do not know the impact of livestock grazing on plant regeneration and fragment growth. We do not know if the species within these fragmented forests are metapopulations – a metapopulation is one in which local populations are connected by individuals that migrate between them, e.g. seeds from one population being dispersed into another. The fragments might constitute a metapopulation for giant squirrels because we have recorded 'floaters' – squirrel strangers that wander into our resident population in the Bhimashankar sacred grove; however we do not know specifically from which patches these

floaters come and whether they contribute genes to our resident squirrels. The fragments may not constitute an interbreeding metapopulation for plants and insects, and this could have serious consequences.

**R**ecent studies have shown effects of inbreeding and extinctions in localised butterfly populations.<sup>9</sup> Another study using butterflies as indices of biodiversity has shown that 20-30 ha forest fragments have very depauperate butterfly faunas relative to that in a 227 ha patch separated by a distance of only 0.5-1 km from the small fragments.<sup>10</sup>

A long term study carried out in Amazonia reports that annual tree mortality and tree damage were nearly eight times higher at the edges of fragments rather than in the interior due to microclimatic changes and wind-turbulence at the edges.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by using realistic fragment shapes in a model, it was found that a fragment of 1000 ha has 22-42% of its total area influenced by edge effects whereas a fragment of 500 ha would have 30-58% of its area influenced by edge, and that the edge effect for trees penetrated to a distance of 100 m from the fragment boundary.<sup>11</sup> The penetrance of the edge effect for grasshoppers was found to be 30 m in another study in South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

The behaviour of frugivorous birds would also need to be considered, as their movement between fragments would determine the extent of seed dispersal and thereby plant genetic exchange between fragments. The movement of fruit-eating birds between forest and pasture was found to be restricted to a distance of 1-80 m from the border of the forest.<sup>13</sup>

Based on data from the Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project in Amazonia, Laurance and Gascon<sup>14</sup> provide many management

recommendations that could ensure maximum ecological connectivity of forest fragments. Obviously all of their recommendations cannot be directly applied to any landscape but the data do speak for themselves. Small fragments are much more vulnerable than larger patches. The Bhimashankar fragments are all in the small size range – one sacred grove is of the order of 0.5 ha! Management strategies for large areas are, therefore, obviously different from the small areas; especially if their shapes are such that they have more relative edge. Lack of ecological connectivity between patches would mean that even in a small sanctuary of 130 sq km like Bhimashankar, the actual internal ecological units are orders of magnitude smaller. Research on the effects of fragment size, shape and connectivity is desperately needed for areas like Bhimashankar.

**C**onservation biologists have now started to talk in terms of pollinator therapy for isolated populations of plants which would involve hand pollinations as well as reintroductions and re-establishment of suitable pollinator populations.<sup>15</sup> At Bhimashankar, we know that if carpenter bee populations were lost, we would lose *Heterophragma*. It is difficult to imagine hand pollinating 30-foot tall trees and that too by bringing in pollen from diverse individuals, as the carpenter bees normally do! It is obvious that plant species that are self incompatible, that do not reproduce by clonal propagation, that do not coppice when cut or damaged, that are dioecious, that are dependent on a single or few pollinators and seed dispersers, are much more vulnerable to local extinctions than others.<sup>16</sup>

Behavioural aberrations or changes also occur in larger animals in fragmented areas when they are

either crowded (recall the aggression in giant squirrels) or when their populations become too small. The idea that a few protected pairs or breeding individuals can restock depleted populations has often been found to be untrue because minimum group sizes are sometimes required for effective breeding or foraging behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

**F**inally, a fundamental issue that has to be addressed is the one of resource substitutability. Many individual species within ecosystems cannot use resources other than those that they have adapted to over generations of evolutionary time. A habitat specialist is a habitat specialist; an obligate seed-disperser or pollinator relationship is just what it is – obligate. There is nothing really to argue with here. However, humans can use resource substitutes if they have to; cultural evolution in humans can occur within single generations. Humans can adopt substitutes for food, clothing, shelter and many other resources even within the same generation.

Am I advocating, therefore, universal and forcible acculturation of all tribal societies? No. But surely there can no longer be any dispute about the fact that the sort of management for survival needed for members of natural ecosystems, other than humans, is more difficult than that required for humans, especially if the humans involved are already changing from being true ecosystem people? High priority conservation areas, sacred groves, safety forests – these are just different names for areas set aside for ecosystem survival and resource renewal. I will concede that in large resource catchment areas, some types of traditional resource harvesting regimes by local people are acceptable if the harvesting patterns are tried and tested relative to the rates of resource renewal. But I am advocating a

refugium position for fragmented forests like those of Bhimashankar because they are small; very, very, small.

Just as the onus on one side, the refugium position, is to show that this is necessary by more specific research of the type outlined in this article, surely the onus on the other side is to show that it is not. And surely if there is a genuine doubt, the precautionary principle should prevail. It is time for conservationists of all inclinations to talk to each other without rancour and to work together pragmatically to find solutions. Moreover, solutions need to be sought on a case-by-case basis, and cannot be applied across the board. For it is clear that management for one size does not indeed fit all.

I conclude with a selection from Pablo Neruda's *Critical Sonata*:

Before, we had to battle  
with weapons of doubtful caliber  
and, wounding ourselves, we forgot  
what we were fighting about.

.....

And so I think that maybe  
at last we could be just  
or at last we could simply be.  
We have this final moment,  
and then forever  
for not being, for not coming back.

(From *Memorial de Isla Negra*,  
1964)

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# Massacre of the innocents

ASAD R. RAHMANI

A NEW idiom of wildlife conservation is participatory or joint forest management, which ostensibly means involving local communities in the conservation and sustainable utilization of biodiversity. While the merits and demerits of this approach are dealt with elsewhere, I will briefly describe the participatory approach which we should adopt to save the great Indian bustard and other wildlife of the grasslands.

The great Indian bustard, *Ardeotis nigriceps*, is a large handsome bird of the short grass plains of the Indian subcontinent. Formerly it was widely distributed from Punjab and West Bengal in the North to Tamil Nadu in the South and Sind (in Pakistan) in the West to Orissa in the East.

It always favoured the grassy plains, often highly overgrazed by livestock or wild herbivores, and strictly avoided hilly and forest regions. Consequently, it was absent in the thick forests of Central India as also the Western and Eastern ghats. It was mainly found in the drier Deccan plains with sparse vegetation, Saurashtra peninsula and the Thar desert. A hundred years ago it was fairly common in Sholapur, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad and Beed districts of Maharashtra, Kurnool, Mehboobnagar and Anantapur districts of Andhra Pradesh, almost the whole of Saurashtra (except the Gir forests), parts of Kutch, the Thar desert and some parts of eastern Rajasthan.

In its open, flat or slightly undulating habitat, standing almost a meter

tall and weighing 7 to 10 kilogram, the great Indian bustard is a conspicuous bird. Its main defense against natural predators is its keen eye-sight, strong flight and a tendency to freeze to camouflage itself. Despite its large size, it is not easily noticed when squatting on the ground or standing behind a bush or a clump of grass. Anyway, it does not have to adopt these tactics frequently because there are few natural enemies for an adult bustard. It shares its grassland habitat with the blackbuck, chinkara, nilgai, wolf, fox, jackal and wild-cat. While a wolf could easily kill an adult bustard, the later three are no match. Earlier, the cheetah was a potential predator but it is now extinct in India and even the wolf has become scarce due to persecution by man. The greatest predator now comes on two legs, more often on a four-wheel drive vehicle.

**T**he great Indian bustard was always a quarry or a game bird for hunters but it was not easy to shoot. Three developments which occurred almost simultaneously tilted the balance against the bustard: the advent of the jeep in the mid-1940s after the Second World War, a breakdown of tough wildlife protection laws after India's Independence, and an increase in the number of livestock. Despite its wariness, the great Indian bustard is foolishly unafraid of a vehicle. With criminal hunters realizing the innocence of the great Indian bustard, the massacre started. The bustard disappeared wherever the jeep could reach. At the same time there was a general breakdown in the enforcement of wildlife laws. During the British period, and specially in the numerous princely states dotted all over the country, wildlife laws were strictly observed. Perhaps as a defiance to the colonial and the autocrat's powers,

breaking of wildlife laws by the general public became a norm, resulting in unrestricted killing of helpless wildlife.

**T**he 1950s and 1960s were the worst decades for Indian wildlife. The main sufferers were the denizens of open areas such as the blackbuck, wolf, lesser florican and the great Indian bustard. At the same time, huge areas were colonized for cultivation to feed an increasing human population. The third factor which severely impacted the bustard numbers was overgrazing by livestock. Earlier, almost every village in Saurashtra and Rajasthan had its own grazing areas where some rules were followed to control grazing. These grasslands, called *bheeds* in Saurashtra, *rakhals* in Kutch and *urans* in the Thar, provided grass as well as protected biodiversity. With a breakdown of village control over its lands, there was no one to protect the grasslands, resulting in a free-for-all situation. These *bheeds* and *urans*, so vital to the rural economy, were either overgrazed, given over for cultivation, or planted on by the Forest Department.

The great Indian bustard, belonging to an ancient family of birds, had survived for millions of years but it appears that there is no place for this majestic bird in independent India. Although officially protected since the early 1950s, not a single poacher has ever been persecuted for killing the bustard. On many occasions the Government of India looked the other way when higher-ups were involved. In the early 1960s, enforcement of wildlife laws reached its nadir when the Maharajah of Jaipur offered a dish of bustard meat to the visiting Queen of England. India's distinguished ornithologist, Salim Ali found bustard feathers outside an army mess in Kutch and wrote an angry letter to the

government but no action was taken against the offenders.

The enactment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, at the intervention of Indira Gandhi, gave some hope to the beleaguered animals. But the turning point came in 1979 when there was an uproar in the media against hunting of bustards by Arab sheikhs. The Arabs had come to India at the invitation of the External Affairs Ministry (then headed by the present Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee) to hunt the houbara bustard, a migratory species which arrives in large numbers in the Thar desert during the winter. For the Indian press, a bustard meant the great Indian bustard. Regardless, this avoidable hunting episode came as a blessing in disguise for the great Indian bustard because for the first time the government realized that the popular mood was against the destruction of wildlife in the name of 'sport'. The Forest Department, which till now had not looked beyond forests and tigers, was forced to take some steps for protecting the bustard and its co-inhabitants of the grasslands.

**I**n 1980, the Tourism and Wildlife Society of India, which spearheaded the fight against the Arab sheikhs, successfully organized a conference in Jaipur. Its deliberations revealed that the great Indian bustard survived in six states — Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It had totally disappeared from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Tamil. All the six states where the great Indian bustard survived took conservation measures to protect the remaining populations.

The Government of Rajasthan declared Sonkhaliya near Ajmer a Closed Area to protect the 50-60 bustards and also declared a 3,162 sq. km



Desert National Park in Jaisalmer-Barmer districts. Moreover, a Closed Areas for Shooting was declared near Diyatra in Bikaner district. The bustard was proclaimed as the 'state bird' of Rajasthan. The Madhya Pradesh government created two sanctuaries—Karera in Shivpuri and Ghatigaon in Gwalior—to save the remaining birds, and Maharashtra established a huge area of more than 8,000 sq. km in Sholapur and Ahmednagar districts as a bustard reserve. In 1985, on the recommendations of the Bombay Natural History Society, the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department saved the remaining six square kilometre of dry grassland near Rollapadu village where I had seen the largest known flock of 35 bustards in July 1983.

**D**uring the 1980s, my colleagues and I conducted intensive studies on the great Indian bustard at the Bombay Natural History Society through the funds provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It was found that more than 50% of the great Indian bustard of India were found in the vast waterless grasslands of the Thar desert. These bustards survived because of comparatively lower human disturbance, due mainly to the inaccessibility of the areas, especially for motorized vehicles. Detailed scientific studies were conducted over six years to ascertain its breeding biology and habitat requirement.

As the bustard lives in grasslands and marginal agriculture areas, with a mosaic of grassy patches, cultivated fields and fallow fields, all heavily occupied by humans and their livestock, it is not possible to declare large protected areas, which would exclude human beings. Habitat preference studies revealed that the bustard lives in sparse grassland where the height of vegetation is below its eye level. As soon as a grassland becomes

dense and tall (above one meter), the bustard leaves that patch. This observation had an important bearing on management of bustard grasslands and their sustainable use by humans. The bustard breeds mainly during the monsoon, when grasses should be protected from livestock grazing. After the monsoon (when bustard breeding is over), the grass can be harvested in a scientific manner.

Beside working at a general strategy for bustard and grassland protection, we also made specific recommendations for each bustard habitat. The edaphic and climatic conditions vary from area to area and the same rule of grass harvesting cannot be followed everywhere. But for all the areas we showed that bustard conservation and proper utilization of grassland were not mutually exclusive. Any area developed for fodder production helps the bustard and other wildlife and conversely, grassland plots developed for bustard breeding increase fodder and other biomass, which benefit local communities.

**W**e also recommended that about 10 per cent of a bustard sanctuary could be made into a core area, with strict protection to habitat for most parts of the year. These core areas would serve as seed banks for other grazed grasslands. From these core areas, grass and other biomass were to be harvested only every two or three years to ensure that the habitat remains suitable for bustards. To provide maximum benefit to villagers and bustards, these core areas of not less than 100 hectares should be scattered in different parts of a bustard sanctuary. In Sholapur district it was conclusively proved that the development of core grassland areas greatly helped in recharging the aquifers and village tanks. We suggested that most of these core areas should be on the dry plateau

which are the catchment areas for village tanks.

In the late 1970s, a large number of plantation and grassland plots were developed in Maharashtra under the DPAP (Drought Prone Areas Programme). The main aim of DPAP was to undertake conservation measures for the protection of land that suffered from severe overgrazing and soil erosion. The DPAP not only helped in achieving this aim in certain areas but it also resulted in the restoration of wildlife, especially the great Indian bustard, blackbuck and wolf. In other words, bustard conservation is nothing but sustainable utilization of our grasslands for the benefit of livestock, villagers and wildlife.

**H**owever, the Forest Department, true to its generic orientation, did not appreciate the role of local people in saving the great Indian bustard. As soon as an area was declared a sanctuary, it imposed all sorts of restrictions on the villagers. Instead of working with the villagers for eco-restoration of degraded land, curbs were put on their traditional land use.

The Karera Bustard Sanctuary is a classical example of such mismanagement. This 202 sq km sanctuary was specially created in 1981 for the protection of the great Indian bustard in a highly degraded and marginally agricultural area. About 5 to 8 bustards and 50 to 60 blackbuck precariously survived in this area dominated by *Thakurs*. Some poaching was thus not uncommon. Once the bustard was discovered and the sanctuary came into existence, poaching virtually stopped. The poor and simple inhabitants of the 22 villages falling under the sanctuary were elated by the publicity and visits of high officials. There was tremendous empathy with their *son-chirya* (golden bird) as the bustard was named. Many local people were emp-

loyed as bustard watchmen, which gave them additional pride.

The Bombay Natural History Society conducted studies in Karera from 1982 to 1986 (and later some monitoring till 1994). In the beginning, bustard numbers increased satisfactorily and around 20-25 birds were noted in 1985-86 (this was due to successful breeding and immigration of birds from surrounding areas). However, this soon led to another problem which antagonized the farmers. The blackbuck, which till now was kept under control by poaching, increased by leaps and bounds. By the end of the 1980s, they numbered more than a thousand. Crop damage by blackbuck became a major issue and the ire of farmers turned on the great Indian bustard which they saw as the main cause of their troubles.

**B**ased on our studies conducted over six years, we recommended the development of six core areas in the uninhabited parts of Karera Sanctuary. Livestock grazing was to be banned only during the bustard breeding season (March to July), but instead of developing such areas, the Forest Department gave more emphasis to protecting individual nests. Even this protection was not properly carried out and this futile exercise resulted in the identification of nest sites by villagers. When the time came, the villagers knew where to strike to 'solve' the problem. The consequences were disastrous. By the late 1980s, bustard numbers started declining and the last bird was seen in 1994. We now have an anomalous situation in the Karera Bustard Sanctuary, with the presence of an Assistant Conservator of Forests, a Range Forest Officer, two Foresters, four Forest Guards and 15 bustard watchmen, but no bustard!

The unfortunate story of Karera is being repeated in Sorsan bustard

area in Kota and Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh. Fed up with the crop damage, three bustards were poisoned by irate villagers in Sorsan in January 1998. The Forest Department claims that the bustards died of some mysterious disease. The six sq. km Rollapadu grasslands where 50-60 bustards come for breeding is perhaps the most important bustard habitat left in peninsular India. In this area also, effective protection has resulted in an increase of blackbuck numbers from 17-20 in 1983 to 300-350 in 1994-95. Farmers surrounding these grasslands are up in arms, protesting against crop damage. The situation is just ripe for Naxalites to step in and destroy the sanctuary.

We have conducted studies in Rollapadu since 1985 and have made extensive recommendations to the Forest Department, but little action has been taken. Our recommendations emphasized the importance of involving local communities and proper publicity to benefits accruing from conservation. Once it is demonstrated that grass production increases through protection and that aquifers and wells are restored, the villagers will come forward to protect more grassland areas.

**T**he great Indian bustard is a symbol of a healthy grassland. With more than 420 lakh heads of livestock in India, we need nearly 100 lakh hectares of grasslands. Instead, we have only 12 lakh hectares which may be considered as grassland. With such a large gap between demand and supply, there is a need to look into our land use policies. Eco-restoration of our degraded grasslands, with the help of local people, would not only improve the fodder and other biomass but also make the habitat suitable for species like the great Indian bustard, which has no other place to live.

# A princely bequest

DIVYABHANUSINH

IN tracing the history of hunting through the ages, one would come across a natural order when it was necessary for the survival of man. This continues to be the case for certain tribal peoples of India. In course of time, hunting became a part of court life as an essential requirement for a king and his courtiers to shoot stationary and moving objects to remain fit and agile, and to remain efficient in warfare. Kautilya talks of setting aside special forests for the king's pleasure of hunting, Gupta coins show kings as lion-slayers and so on. *Manasollasa*, the encyclopedic work on court life compiled in the 12th century by Someshwara III, the southern Chalukaya king, records 35 different modes

of hunting deer alone, apart from hunting with dogs, falconry and fishing.

Feroz Shah Tuglaq was a keen hunter and his hunting stables contained so many cheetahs, caracal, falcons, among others that, according to a *shikarnama* of his times, their numbers defied inventory. At the height of their imperial glory, the Mughals turned hunting into a great court activity. These pageants became larger than life and were the favourite pastime of Akbar and Jahangir. The disintegration of the Mughal empire in the North and the rise of large principalities in the South – such as Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Cochin and other smaller states – saw one-third of the Indian sub-continent

divided into some 500 and odd principalities, which survived till the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947.

For Indian princes, hunting was an important pastime and an integral part of court life as had been the case for centuries. But in the last 100 years of their existence, there was a major departure in the sphere of state activity from previous traditions. As the East India Company, and after 1858 the British Indian Empire, established paramountcy over the sub-continent, they took unto themselves an essential part of the sovereignty of princely states, i.e., the function of external aggression. As such, Indian rulers were left to contend with only internal law and order and such developmental activities as they chose to engage in. The regulation of external affairs by the British also left Indian princes with considerably more time to pursue leisurely activities, such as hunting, as never before in history. By that time hunting had become a 'manly' activity which could be used to great advantage to please the British, brother princes and friends, though it did take the prince into areas of his principality he may not otherwise have visited. But it had lost relevance as an essential training ground for warfare.

It is unfortunately forgotten that hunting activities *ipso facto* required preservation of flora and fauna from destruction by human interference, other than that which was sanctioned by the prince. Hunting and conservation were, in fact, two sides of the same princely coin. It is argued that Indian principalities were autocratic, which was more often than not, true and that princely subjects had few rights as individuals. However, these conditions must be viewed in their historical perspective. Elected legislative assemblies of any importance in British India were only created in 1937,

mainly as a consequence of the Government of India Act of 1935. The concepts of equality, fraternity, liberty and justice, as we know them today, were enshrined in our Constitution as late as 1950.

**B**ut a curious, and perhaps the most important, outcome of the princely legacy was that the royal hunting grounds in different states logically translated into several of India's premier national parks and sanctuaries. For example, the Jaipur state gave us the jungles of Ranthambore; Alwar gave Sariska; Bharatpur gave Keola Deo Ghana; Gwalior gave Shivpuri; Kashmir gave Dachigam; Rewa gave Bandhavgarh; Kolhapur gave Radhanagari; Mysore gave Bandipur; Mayurbhanj in Orissa gave Simlipal; Manipur gave Keibul Lanjao—the home of sangai, the brow antlered deer—to name but a few, after the formation of the Indian Union.

In the Saurashtra peninsula, Bhavnagar gave Velavadar National Park famed for its blackbuck, the states of Junagadh, Baroda and Bhavnagar gave the incomparable Gir forest, and Kutch, Dhrungdhra and smaller Muslim states left behind the Great and Little Rann of Kutch which gave protection to the Asiatic wild ass among other desert fauna such as caracal, desert cat, desert fox, and chinkara.

Apart from being hunters, many of the princes were authorities on animals and birds. For example, Maharao Khengarji of Kutch discovered the flemingo city in the Great Rann in 1893. Dharamkumarsinhji of Bhavnagar wrote his *magnum opus*, *The Birds of Saurashtra*, almost half a century ago, still the standard work on the ornithology of the region. Along with the principal of Saurashtra's princes' college, he also pioneered systematic census operations of large carnivores

in the country. Lavkumar of Jasdan is today a pioneer of nature educationists in the country. The late Darbar Saheb Shivrajsinh of Jasdan was an ornithologist of repute and Maharaj Himmatsinhji of Kutch continues the family tradition of ornithological study. Their work and that of many other princes, forms an important part of the literature of the flora and fauna of India.

Indian princes such as those of Kutch, Baroda, Travancore, and Cochin encouraged others to study the fauna and flora of their states. Salim Ali's studies of Avi fauna were greatly assisted by such princely states. The century old Bombay Natural History Society continues to publish pieces by many princely contributors in its famed Journal; its list of patrons reads like a who's who of the Indian princely order. The Maharaja of Nabha was the moving spirit behind The Wildlife Preservation Society of India. He was in the forefront of the princes who gave up shooting to espouse the cause of protection.

**T**he Maharaja of Korea and Maharaja of Sandur, better known as M.Y. Ghorpade, excelled in nature photography. The Maharaja of Kashmir, Karan Singh, headed the famous Project Tiger at its inception in 1973 and steered it for years thereafter. And M.K. Ranjitsinh of Wankaner was a key official of the Government of India in drafting the first comprehensive legislation to protect wildlife a year earlier in 1972. It was not surprising that Indira Gandhi appointed Y. Digvijaysinh of Wankaner as the first independent minister for environment in the country in 1982. The enlightened among the princely order continue to serve the cause of conservation under the new regime, even though they have lost their traditional power base.

The methods of conservation adopted by the various states were specific to that state and to the requirements of the area to be preserved. However, if one were to make a broad and sweeping statement, it can be said that villages and towns in princely states had the use of their common lands for grazing livestock. Farmers tilled their farmlands, but they were not allowed inside the protected *vidis* (grasslands) or jungles of a state, other than forest villages and settlements. In the post-independence era and with the exploding growth of human, cattle, goat and sheep populations, the first to go were the open grasslands which the princes could not protect since the powers of state were no longer vested in them. This was followed by the destruction of the forests.

It would be instructive to go somewhat deeper into the experience of one particular state, Junagadh, which included most of the Gir forest, home to the Asiatic lion. The state of Junagadh rose from the ashes of the Mughal Empire in the mid-18th century. Ruled by Babi Muslims, it had a notable record of peaceful administration and communal harmony. It covered an area of approximately 3,300 sq miles. The total area of the Gir forest was about 1,000 sq miles, most of it in Junagadh state, i.e., one third of the state was jungle.

In the age old Indian royal tradition, the biggest carnivore was royal game – only the ruler could hunt it and others only by royal permission or sufferance. In Kutch, it was the leopard, and when it became extinct, the Maharao reintroduced it. In Mysore or Mayurbhanj it was the tiger, and so on. Expectedly, therefore, the lion was royal game of the Nawabs of Junagadh. Indeed, it was their state emblem, apart from being portrayed on a postage stamp in 1929, thereby becoming

the first wild animal to be depicted on a postage stamp in the Indian sub-continent. No one could shoot the lion without the Nawab's permission. Its protection was of paramount importance and a succession of Nawabs jealously guarded their small numbers.

By 1880, few lions survived; the figure doing the rounds at the time was that only a dozen were left. In 1890 the figure was believed to be 31. It is said that the number dwindled to a mere 19 by 1899-1900, the year of *chappanyo kal*, the great famine. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, who visited Junagadh state in 1900, declined to shoot a lion on hearing from the Nawab about the few that remained. This incident was behind Lord Curzon's statement, the first from the highest in the empire, for the conservation of fauna and flora in his celebrated letter to the Burma Game Preservation Association in 1902. Nawab Rasul Khanji was gravely concerned about the lions and he was instrumental in bringing their plight to Lord Curzon's attention, thereby freeing him from the pressure of British officers and brother princes for shooting permits for lions in his state.

The figures quoted are from the Junagadh state records. They were estimates rather than a result of credible enumeration. The fact remains that lions were in extreme danger of being wiped out. The state was alive to the danger, and the Nawab went out of his way to protect them.

Nawab Rasul Khanji died in 1911 and the state came under British administration for a decade until the 20 year old Nawab Mahbat Khanji came of age and was invested with full powers in 1920. In that year, according to R. Ratnagar's estimate of the state Forest Department, the number of lions had increased to 100. Was this figure accurate? If so, was it a result

of strict control over lion shooting by the British administration? Or was it because of an increase in natural prey species and lesser interference in the jungle by man and cattle after the famine of 1899-1900? Were the earlier estimates far lower than what they should have been? Had the lions become prolific breeders due to an undisturbed habitat? We do not know for sure; perhaps the increase was a result of some, or all, of these factors. It is certain though that the lion population was on the increase.

During the British administration, the Gir forest was studied at great length and working plans, which were initiated by Nawab Rasul Khanji's administration, were followed by more elaborate ones. Tighter controls for timber extraction, as also grazing rights of forest villages and herdsmen (Maldharis) were introduced. Timber being an important source of income, the Gir forest was never a sanctum sanctorum for wildlife, though large tracts of it remain undisturbed to this day. Even a system of payment was evolved to compensate owners of cattle whose livestock was taken away by lions.

Nawab Mahbat Khanji was a man of quiet disposition and was not particularly fond of hunting. Tradition has it that he would go to the Gir for a shoot. A good male lion would be tracked down for him while he waited for the lion to appear before the *machan*. But he would not shoot, remarking that the animal was not big enough and return to Junagadh! While he did on occasion shoot lions, as it was customary, it would be safe to say that the Junagadh royal family probably shot less than 10 lions between 1920 and 1947.

Permission to shoot lions was given sparingly to a few British officers or brother princes of Kathiawar

or from elsewhere. While the records are not complete, it is doubtful if permits for more than two animals per year was given by Junagadh state during this 27 year period. However, according to a recent estimate by M.K. Ranjitsinh, roughly 10 to 20 lions were killed in and around Junagadh state, with or without permission, between 1920 and 1947.

**T**he Gir forest also extended into the Amreli district of Baroda state and the Mityala area of Bhavnagar state. While the Maharajas of Baroda and Bhavnagar hunted in their own areas, the Nawab had another problem on his hands — that of the Junagadh lions straying into adjoining territories of the smaller Kathi and other states. In fact, the Forest Department of Junagadh employed beaters and drummers to drive back itinerant lions into Junagadh state territory to save them from being shot. To the rulers of adjoining states, the lions were not 'theirs' and therefore fair game!

In August 1947, Nawab Mahbat Khanji acceded to Pakistan. This caused turmoil in the state, though he continued to live in Junagadh until his departure for Karachi in October 1947. A government in exile, *Arzi Hakumat*, had been formed earlier and on his departure, Junagadh state came under the direct control of the Dominion government. A year later, the state of Junagadh was merged into the United State of Saurashtra and in this messy way the Gir forest, with its treasured lions, became a reluctant bequest to the Indian Union. It is creditable that the government of Saurashtra continued to protect the Gir and the hunting of lions became the sole prerogative of the *Rajpramukh*, the Head of State. Though lions continued to be officially hunted, the number of permits were reduced until the practice was stopped around 1955.

Despite these turbulences and troubled times, a census of the lion population was carried out in 1950 by M.A. Wynter Blyth, Principal of Raj Kumar College, Rajkot and Maharaj Dharamkumarsinhji of Bhavnagar based on identification of foot prints. Their census showed 219 to 227 lions in Gir and its surrounding areas. Incidentally, their methodology for large carnivore census became a precursor to similar efforts decades later for the tiger, after the inauguration of Project Tiger in 1972. The increase in lion population between 1920 and 1947 from 100 to 219/227 shows over 100% growth. Though the Nawab and Maharajas of Baroda and Bhavnagar hunted lions during this period, it was the protection they gave to the animals and their habitat that enabled the lions to survive and increase during their regimes.

**T**he merger of Indian states implied that the powers of the state were vested in democratic institutions. A firearms licence could be obtained without much of a problem by anybody who wanted it. Princely states, wherein no one but the prince and his entourage could hunt, now became open country to anyone who wanted to shoot, legally or otherwise. A fear of retaliation from the princes lingered on in former state areas, certainly till the first general election of 1952 and to a lesser extent till 1957. Apart from shooting permits being issued liberally, poachers found their way into grasslands and forests. The author remembers venison being openly sold in Ahmedabad in the early 1950s.

If one were to summarise the legacy of the Indian princes, it may be said that autocratic rule ensured that fewer human beings were after wild animals than in our democratic times. Ever so often, the case of the Maharaja of Surguja who shot more than

1,000 tigers in his lifetime is mentioned as an example of wanton destruction. This was certainly so. But, it was the vanity of one man; the state always had tigers despite his hunting aberrations. The situation becomes very different when 1,000 hunters, legally or otherwise, want to shoot a tiger, maybe even one every year. Equality, liberty and the more or less unfettered right to bear arms for man have a different connotation for fauna, which make for impressive trophies or add exotic taste to the table!

**I**n princely India, most princes were keen hunters. To them it was a matter of personal concern and pride that their favourite hunting grounds were protected. This certainly is not the case when an impersonal bureaucracy is headquartered in a distant state capital and whose masters, the central government, sits in an even more distant Delhi.

Each prince maintained a careful estimate of his favourite game, usually the tiger or lion, as in the Gir. The state administrations honestly reported their conclusions, even if they were unfavourable or alarming, for example of the declining lion population in Gir. Today such census figures have become a 'game' of increasing numbers. According to census reports, lions have increased from 205 in 1979 to 239 in 1985 to 284 in 1990 to 304 in 1995. During this period, the Gir has shrunk to almost half its turn of the century size, and it has come under increasing pressure from humans and cattle! The more famous tiger census figures speak volumes. One tiger reserve enumerated, apart from ever increasing tigers and other large fauna, porcupine, giving a breakdown of the number of males and females—a remarkable feat indeed.

Hunting required acute knowledge of the animals hunted, their habits, preferences of habitat and so on. Over the centuries a class of 'trackers' or *pagis* developed. Their knowledge of the jungle they frequented was incomparable. Their knowledge of the animals they tracked was awesome. Their ability to track the animal down by reading footprints and other signs in the forest had to be seen to be believed. It is a matter of regret that with the disappearance of royal patronage, this knowledge and art has vanished for all times, without the current powers that be learning from it. This is equally true of the incomparable knowledge about hawks, falcons, eagles and cheetahs that the *baazdars* and cheetah trainers, particularly of Bhavnagar and Kolhapur states, had of the life-cycle and ailments of these birds and animals. Unfortunately, along with the stopping of falconry and coursing with cheetahs, this too has vanished, though this knowledge could have been the basis for many a scientific enquiry for the protection of these species.

**T**he baiting of carnivores for *shikar* was a standard practice in India up to the time hunting was banned. The practice continued in some places for showing carnivores to tourists. In 1956, Jawaharlal Nehru visited the Gir. He wanted to see lions. Extensive baiting was resorted to, and subsequently it became the normal practice to show lions to lesser tourists. This practice ultimately degenerated into ludicrous 'lion shows', where hundreds of human beings could see the king of beasts at a distance of a few yards. Mercifully, the practice was finally stopped, apparently as a result of Indira Gandhi's personal intervention.

Prior to 1947, the pressures of human, cattle, sheep and goat populations were far less than the explosion

witnessed from the 1960s onwards. It is not realised today that the needs of the people were, therefore, far less then in terms of requirements of fuel, grass and wood. In Gir alone, for example, apart from some 18,000 cattle which live in the forest, 50,000 or more enter during the summer and monsoon months. This was never the case during the Nawab's regime. Equally unheard of was the regular poisoning of lions by Maldharis who started inserting pesticides in cattle kills for want of an efficient system of compensation for their loss. Similar conditions are regularly reported from other protected areas as well where tigers become the target of ire.

**T**he deeds and misdeeds of Indian princes have been the subject of wonder, more often criticism and ridicule. Suffice it to say that their actions were part of the historical process. But it was the princely pursuits which left behind a substantial portion of the core of flora and fauna to be preserved by the inheritors of their powers and prerogatives.

It is the tragedy of our times that we continue with an insensitive administration headed by disinterested peoples' representatives. While in the short term, India is hailed as a great success story of a free people, the polity as a whole has failed to devise a successful system of protection for the little of our natural heritage that remains. Apart from galloping population growth, the increasing expectations of a better standard of living and an extensive use of insecticides, pesticides and the like to increase agricultural production, continue to devastate our natural resources. If we ever discover the genius to succeed against these odds to preserve what we have, it would be a fitting republican complement to the princely bequest.

# A problem with pachyderms

VIVEK MENON

ABIOLOGIST would blanch at clubbing an elephant with a rhino. The two are totally unrelated and their nearest ancestor might well have been a rabbit-sized African mammal which lived nearly 500 million years ago. In loose colloquial language, the two are referred to as pachyderms. The Latin term pachyderm is merely a physical description meaning tough skin. The rhino and the elephant are, however, joined together by the term—unscientific, illogical but convenient. In India the two giants are linked by much more than a name. Both are mega-herbivores, both require space and both are killed for parts of their bodies that are high valuable commodities in the wildlife trade markets of the Far East. In trying to conserve them, these similarities are therefore paramount.

The greater one horned rhino is one of five rhinoceros species found in the world, two in Africa and three

in Asia. The three Asian rhinos are all perilously endangered, globally there being only 3,000 of them. Internationally, the sad story of the decline of the African rhino is well known. Despite the sharp decrease in the African black and white rhinoceroses, they still number more than 10,000. Of the three Asian species, the Javan and Sumatran are very endangered, the former having a world population of 50-100 and the latter only 300.

In comparison, the 2,000 greater one horned rhinos that exist in India and Nepal seem to be a conservation success story. In India the rhinos appeared in the North West along the riverine plains of the Indus and Ganges rivers nearly 60 million years ago. The species, *Rhinoceros unicornis*, has remains unchanged for all these years despite being slowly pushed eastwards into small pockets of protected lands. The number of rhinos mean-



while diminished every successive year. Globally, the 30 genera of the rhinoceros family went down to only five. In India, the days of the rhinoceros slowly started coming to an end.

In 1030 AD, the traveller-historian Al Beruni wrote of the animal which existed 'in large numbers in India, more particularly about the Ganges.' Ibn Batuta, an Arab traveller, saw rhinoceroses near the Indus river in 1340 AD. Babur, the first Mughal emperor of India (1505-1530 AD), hunted rhinoceroses west of the Indus River, which he records as being called *kargkhana* or 'rhinoceroses-home', in such great numbers were the animals found there. He also records the existence of rhinoceroses near Peshawar (now in Pakistan) and, in fact, uses the word 'masses' to describe the quantity in which they were found. However, a few years later, in March 1529, Babur found no rhinoceroses near Benaras when he went there for a hunt. Sidi Ali, a Turkish admiral of Suleiman the Great, saw, in 1556, rhinoceroses in northern Pakistan near the city of Peshawar and records them as having a horn of two hands' length. Akbar, the third Mughal emperor of India (1542-1605), records the existence of rhinoceroses near Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh. Another Mughal emperor, Jahangir, records them in his memoirs as inhabiting Aligarh.

A large number of miniature paintings and other 'naturalistic' representations depicting rhinoceroses were made in India between 1500 and 1650 and are characterised by the famous miniature painting of circa 1600, showing Emperor Jahangir hunting rhinoceroses. Although these animals are easily recognisable as greater one horned rhinoceros, all three Asian rhinoceroses once inhabited the Indian subcontinent. The Javan and Sumatran rhinoceroses

*Rhinoceros sondaicus* and *Dicerohinus sumatrensis* became extinct in India in the early part of this century and the greater one horned rhinoceros is therefore now the only rhinoceros species left in the country. While the Javan rhinoceros was the first to be extirpated, perhaps as far back as 1900, the Sumatran rhinoceros is believed to have survived till 1935.

Both these rhinoceros species had an easterly distribution in India, the Javan rhinoceros being known from Bangladesh to Assam and Sikkim in the far north-east of India. The Sumatran rhinoceros is reported to have existed in Assam also, and areas bordering Burma. The greater one horned rhinoceros, in comparison, ranged from as far west as Pakistan, to the very north-eastern tip of India. Past evidence shows that the species existed from Pakistan to the Indian border with the countries of Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan, and may have also existed in southern China, Myanmar itself, and even further east. The species disappeared from most of northern India during the 17th and 18th centuries, as a result of the combined pressures of habitat loss and hunting: few records exist of the greater one horned rhinoceroses in northern India from the 19th century.

The Asian elephant, *Elephas maximus*, was first noted in India in the Shivalik hills and seems to have come from Africa where it evolved nearly five million years ago. The rhino is therefore a far older animal in comparison. Although much like the rhino, the elephant came in from the north-west, it did not restrict itself to riverine plains and occupied large portions of peninsular India. The sweep of the elephant across India is roughly crescent shaped. It is missing from the high Himalayas as also from the coasts, and is not present in central

and western India. The rhino is an animal of swamps and marshes, grasslands and waterbodies. In comparison the elephant is at home in forests, grasslands and even land occupied by human beings. This adaptiveness by the relatively newer species has helped its survival to a greater extent than the rhino. Today, the range of the Asian elephant spreads over 400,000 sq km in 13 countries. There are 50,000 elephants in the continent and India has more than half of them.

A striking contrast between the two pachyderms is their family life. The rhino is by and large a loner. Males and females come together only for mating and otherwise lead a solitary life. Once the female is pregnant, neither her mate nor any other female rhino gives her any help. She has a long pregnancy of nearly two years and then brings up her single child for nearly two and a half years. After this, the child can look after itself and the mother is free to mate again. This means that the mother has invested nearly five years in bringing up one child, a heavy price to pay in evolutionary terms. The elephants on the other hand live in families. Although the males are also largely loners, the females live in families or herds consisting of a large number of adults and calves. Though the elephant normally gives birth to one calf, the survival rate of its offspring is better than that of the rhinos because of care by the herd.

The elephant and rhino are bound together not only by biology but also by threats to their very existence. The first conservation problem is that of space. India is the seventh largest country in the world. It has negated this natural gift by cramming itself with nearly one billion people. In the tiny cracks and crevices left, the rest of life struggles to exist. These

habitats are minute and fragmented, hemmed in by the thronging crowds. Into these rat-holes must fit the gargantuan bulk of the elephant and the rhino.

*Elephas maximus*, the Asian elephant is smaller than its African cousin, but adult males weigh a few tons. The Indian rhino is larger than all the other four species of rhino found in the world. Sizes of this sort require space, just to eat food and procreate. This is much more so in the case of elephants, who lead a locally migratory life. A fixed amount of space for them to take a morning walk is not enough. Elephants move seasonally between feeding grounds and in the process come into contact with human beings. The rhino on the other hand is found in protected area pockets, where a day-to-day conflict situation does not arise. This is, of course, not as much the credit of the rhino, but of man who has limited the spread of the animal.

**H**istorically the rhino extended from Pakistan, through the rich alluvial plains of the Ganga to the tip of north eastern India where it met with the Sumatran and Javan species. Today the same animal is confined to seven protected areas in Assam and West Bengal, venturing out occasionally only to be chased back by stone throwing people. It is slightly more difficult to chase an elephant. To start with, elephants often move in larger numbers than the rhinos. They are also intelligent enough to go where they want to go and find a method to do it. And so, the elephant comes into contact with man. Aggressive, bloody contact.

Assam today has 5,000 elephants of which 1,000 are captive. The *mela shikar* of Assam that resulted in the capture of 300-400 elephants every year from the wilds was banned

in 1978, and the 4,000-odd wild elephants of the state were left to roam free. It was only recently that the Assam government was forced to re-introduce the scheme of elephant capture after marauding elephants left a trail of destruction throughout the state as well as in eastern and southern India. In 1985 at least 85 people were killed in Assam, and in one small pocket of Holangapar alone, local elephants accounted for 12 lives in three years. In south Bihar about 20 persons were killed in 1992 and over Rs 1,20,000 paid as compensation to families of the victims. In 1992-93, 633 people were paid compensation just in the East Khasi district of Meghalaya and in the same year, 29 different cases of elephant depredation caused the loss of crops on 326 ha of land near Pakoi sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh. Add to this the 30-50 people killed annually in South India as well as the case of one adult bull elephant plowing through 940 sq km of land rich with finger millet crop in Hosanur in Karnataka and the scale of devastation becomes clear.

**E**cological studies on the elephant make clear that catching elephants seasonally will not solve the problem of crop raiding or manslaughter. This would only cause fragmentation in elephant herds and make the creature more intolerant of man. Man has encroached on ancient elephant migratory paths by building the Chilla barrage across the Terai near Hardwar and stopping the northern pachyderms from coming into the plains. Although firecrackers, shooting, electric fences, trenches and loudspeakers have been, sporadically used to keep away the angry Ganesha, a permanent solution can only come through an understanding of elephant behaviour and a respect for their traditional migratory paths.

The problem with space is accentuated by the fact that we are rapidly losing our forests. What was an elephant jungle ten years ago is today a banana farm; what was a rhino swamp is today drained and settled down by immigrant Bangladeshis. Rhinos, with their relative lack of evolutionary initiative, are being increasingly confined into small safe deposit lockers. The elephants, which have more of a means to protest, do so by bulldozing through houses and killing human beings in fairly large numbers.

**A** second problem common to both the behemoths relates to poaching for the trade. Few tribes eat rhino meat and even fewer eat elephant. The hunting era of a century ago does not exist any more. So the animals are killed for trade – the elephant for its tusks and the rhino for its horns. The demand largely caters to a foreign people, both items ending up in the Far East. The patterns of this second pressure are also similar for both the elephant and the rhino. At the ground level, poachers are relatively low key and crudely armed. There are exceptions to this such as rhino poaching in Assam and the terror of Veerappan in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. In these cases, poaching has taken a more organised and well-armed shape. Otherwise it continues to remain the preserve of local gangs financed and egged on by middlemen and traders.

At the level of trade, both are master-minded by well organised mafia and the word 'poaching' and illegal smuggling has been replaced by wildlife crime. Both the rhino horn and the elephant ivory have limited use in India – one for internal carving and the other for limited medicine systems. It is traditional oriental use, however, that puts a heavy price on both animals. Rhino horn is prized in traditional Chinese medicine, a kilo

selling for as much as US \$50,000. This is in its final shape in a Taiwanese or Chinese market. In India, the man who kills a rhino may get a few thousand rupees. Similarly, ivory finds its way into the Far East as carvings or as supply for the Japanese name seal industry. The Japanese cannot sign and require three seals to go through life. The richer one is, the better should be the material of the seal. For this there is nothing that transcends ivory. As gold is to the Indian, ivory is to the Japanese. This craze for the white gold spurs on the poaching of elephants.

**H**ow does poaching affect the rhino and the elephant? For one, the two react differently showing their biological dissimilarities. There are only 2000 one horned rhinos in the world; 500 in Nepal and 1500 in India. Both males and females have horns and both are equally big. Poachers therefore go for either male or female. This unbiased killing puts a direct pressure on this very small population. India at one stage was losing up to 60 rhinos a year to poaching, a huge figure considering the total number. Last year we lost over 100 elephants due to poaching, nearly double the rhino figure. At a cursory glance it may appear that this does not pose a problem. This is because there are 25 times as many elephants than rhinos; 50,000 in Asia, 30,000 in India. The problem is actually slightly more insidious. In Asia only males have tusks and only adult males have large enough tusks to interest a poacher. The number of adult tuskers in India is less than 2000, perhaps even as low as 1500. Much like the rhinos. The problem does exist after all.

Socially, the two animals are on two different planes. The elephant is a god, even if it is turning out to be a nuisance. In most parts of the country

Ganesh is still worshipped. In most places people still respect the elephant. Most people will not harm it knowingly. In comparison, the rhino has little religious significance. The people of Assam call it a state animal and preserve Kaziranga primarily because of the fame that it has given Assam. Still, the government does not consider it enough of a priority to give it money, or to even give salaries on time. The rhino's fate is largely linked to that of the state government. As most rhinos are found in government-managed protected areas, it is the will, or lack of it, of the elected representatives that will decide the fate of the rhino.

**T**he fate of the elephant on the other hand is linked to the people at large. Mere conservation measures by the government will not save the species. The elephant comes out of its designated areas, reminding man, sometimes brutally, of its existence. A god who is the largest land mammal in the world. So far, people are not against either of the animals. This is perhaps why both of them have survived for so many years. While they were being wiped out of neighbouring countries, they have clung on in India. But the country of their habitat has the largest number of human beings and therefore the largest potential for conflict. It is just that the human being in India is struggling to live; not pointedly against these animals but rendered apathetic by fate. Though the conservation wisdom of their ancestors still rings in Indian ears, the exhausting business of living prevents them from hearing it. It is thus left to that section of our countrymen who are fortunate enough to have their daily needs taken care of to look after these giants. It will take a while for the rest of the country to join them. It is important that these animals survive till then.

# Animal farm

INDRANEIL DAS

WHILE the conservation of biological diversity is considered desirable and in the public interest, biodiversity conservation by itself may be difficult to quantify economically, particularly in India where the common man struggles to stay alive. Inhabitants of zones surrounding protected wildernesses often dislike protected areas because they generally provide little income, restrict their cattle from grazing within the boundaries, and lead to crop damage and loss of human lives to wild animals.

In these zones the state has exclusive rights to vast tracts of forest and other land, and few or no rights of the human populations inhabiting the area are recognized. The Indian Forest Department came to own a fifth of the land area of the subcontinent as a result of its colonial background, making it one of the largest forestry enterprises in the world. Conflicts over forest use practices have led to virtually uncontrolled, mostly unsustainable exploitation of forest resources by the local land owners, including those traditionally dependent on forests, recent settlers and agencies with interests in timber, mineral and other extractive processes. Thus, although states have appropriated large areas displacing local communities, the policing of forests has generally been lax, with the result that alternative structures to allow sustainable use of forests are non-existent and ineffective.

New management systems need to define the tenurial rights as well as needs of local communities, and more active participation in land use planning by the people should be encour-

aged. Sustainable utilization of wildlife, sometimes through farming and ranching, has the potential to create a 'vested interest' within local communities to protect wildlife, which otherwise has no monetary value to people. Whenever possible and feasible, modern conservation procedures should be synthesized with traditional conservation principles. Community participation should be encouraged by promoting sustainable use to build a solid socio-economic basis for conservation.

One of the few truly sustainable projects involving herpetofauna is the snake venom project run by Irula tribals in Tamil Nadu, South India. Irulas are a tribe of approximately 100,000, inhabiting the South Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Irulas have caught snakes, mostly for the now illegal snake-skin trade, for generations. The ban on the trade (in 1978) deprived them of this primary source of income. The Irula Snake Catchers Industrial Cooperative Society, formed in 1979, started with 26 Irula members with an expertise in catching, without any protective device, the 'big four' poisonous snakes in the plains of south India: the spectacled cobra (*Naja naja*), common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), saw-scaled viper (*Echis carinatus*) and Russell's viper (*Daboia russelii*).

Snakes caught from the wild are brought to the society's premises, where they are measured, weighed and clipped with a code identification unique to the snake. The snake is then kept for a fortnight, during which it is

milking of its venom two to three times for the manufacture of anti-venom serum and other life-saving drugs. After the extraction, the snake is released back into the wild. Proceeds from the sale of the venom have helped improve the lifestyle of the Irulas. Currently, the society has a membership of 200 Irula men, women and children.

**C**onsumptive utilisation strikes a raw nerve among many colleagues, but given the fact that it works, it should at least be looked at impassionately. That chickens, pigs, cows, sheep and goats (leave alone rice, wheat, and virtually everything we eat) undoubtedly had wild ancestors shows the human genius. Achieving success in creating a closed system, with little or no dependence on the wild, is no mean feat, and it can be replicated. There is evidence to show that sustainable use of wild species – be it limited harvesting from the wild (ranching) or even a closed system of raising (farming) for meat, leather, horns, bones and so on, has the potential to improve the lifestyles of the local landowners, promote socio-economic growth in the region and even contribute to practical conservation activities through public participation in protecting what is envisaged as 'theirs', money for hiring of guards and purchase of guns, wireless and patrolling vehicles.

A large amount of data can be generated from studies of animals kept for sustainable utilisation projects, with little additional resources. This includes biological information, such as population size, recruitment, age to maturity, breeding period, mortality rates, population structure, sex ratio and relationships with sympatric species.

Opponents of sustainable utilisation claim that the system would lead to uncontrolled poaching of wild crocodilians should crocodilian farm-

ing be legalised. As a signatory to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), all shipments of endangered wildlife and wildlife products are accompanied with numbered tags, and every country receives an export quota from the CITES secretariat. As such, it is virtually impossible to fool the system, which has been shown to work even in countries

of South America and Africa where law enforcement is less than perfect.

Whether we like it or not, the economics of some of the wildlife sustainable utilisation projects has been shown to be viable. On account of ecothermy in turtles and their adaptability to captive conditions, turtle farming has been shown to be more economical than cattle farms in South America. A one acre lake with the

### Farm a crocodile and save a tiger

IN the wake of the CITES meeting in Harare, the Government of India has come under local and international fire for letting tiger and elephant numbers dwindle, and for voting against sustained usage of wildlife by countries which care for their wildlife heritage.

There is light at the end of the tunnel though, as long as a dialogue can be initiated. The government and a section of environmental lobbyists, claim that India does not have the requisite infrastructure to deal with control of wildlife usage. Our contention is that enough money can be generated through crocodile farming to pay for crocodile, tiger and elephant conservation in the wild and for management of habitats.

How can it be done? This is the plan, and if it sounds naïve and uninformed, first stack it up against what is now being accomplished to save these animals and their habitats:

1. Crocodiles would be encouraged to breed again at farms like the Madras Crocodile Bank and other state farms where sexes have been separated and eggs destroyed for several years to disallow further breeding.
2. Hatchling crocodiles would be reared by an organisation set up especially for the purpose for two to three years till they reach the size preferred for leather goods.
3. The crocodiles will be fed on rats caught from rice fields, thus saving rice and giving employment to the Irula tribals and other communities among the so-called 'weaker sections'.
4. Crocodiles reared to about 1.5 m in length would be humanely slaughtered and virtually all of the reptile used for leather, protein production and other by-products.
5. Skins would be exported to Japan, France or Italy, the CITES signatory countries which pay the best prices for raw crocodile skins. Once the system proves to be workable, skins can be tanned and fine leather articles made in India to benefit Indian craftsmen and industry.
6. Each skin would be 'tagged' with an unreproducible magnetic number tag which can be simply read with a device similar to that used to read bar codes in a supermarket.
7. Meat would be consumed locally by Irulas and other local communities who appreciate the value of high protein, low cholesterol meat. This white meat has a high export value.
8. After covering all the overheads, the profits realized from the export of crocodile skins would be channelled into the conservation network: primarily NGOs with a proven track record of working successfully with the Forest Department and the people living in and around wild habitats (this concept obviously needs expansion and plenty of simple, imaginative input).

We estimate that by the third year a crocodile farm the size of the Madras Crocodile Bank, can produce 15,000 skins per year with a gross income of Rs 7,39,20,000 and an annual net profit of Rs 2,51,70,000, much of which could be directly used for protection of wild crocodiles, tigers, elephants, their habitats and research.

Does this sound radical? Not at all; plenty of other countries have done similar things for decades. We are talking of an industry that has 40 years of history with remarkable success, and good, healthy, wildlife populations to show for it.

It's time for an urgent dialogue on this issue. It's not a hornet's nest nor a Pandora's box. What we're talking about is practical wildlife management that works because it's dynamic and it is pro-people. What we've been trying to do in India so far has always been anti-people, unimaginative, and without adequate resources. It's time for a change! Why does India have to depend on overseas funds to conserve its own wildlife heritage?

**Romulus Whitaker and Harry Andrews**  
Madras Crocodile Bank

giant South American turtle (*Podocnemis expansa*) can produce approximately 440 times more meat—22,000 lb/acre/year, than a one acre cattle pasture—50 lb/acre/year. Techniques for the mass culture of freshwater turtles are now developed. The use of by-products, such as bones and cartilage for the manufacture of chicken and fish feed, glue, fertilizers and soup stock has the potential to increase the economic viability of freshwater turtle farms. Integration with tourism would help cut overhead costs of running farms for many reptile species, as shown by the Madras Crocodile Bank, which, unlike all government-run zoos, actually generates a profit.

**F**lesh of the *mugger* is consumed by many indigenous groups in India, and can be a cheap source of proteinaceous food for other economically backward sections of the local community, perhaps also a delicacy for the more affluent city folks. The leather can be locally processed and leather products made for export. The illegal nature of reptile skin trade at present makes it impossible for leather-goods manufacturers to use these skins for the production of quality products, although the region has one of the world's finest leather goods industry. Crocodilian farming/ranching technology involving a variety of species of crocodiles and alligators, exists in the region and elsewhere in the world, including Australia, USA, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Papua New Guinea, Mozambique and Botswana. Basic biological information on all three South Asian species is now known. With all species breeding regularly at one or more of the 17 breeding centres in India and the high price of 'classic' category crocodile skin—US \$8-10 per cm belly width—crocodile farming is feasible.

The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, India's largest crocodile farm,

maintains nearly half of India's captive crocodilians. Most of these are muggers, which produce on average 10,000 eggs per year. Research at this facility shows that a stock of 50 females and five males would produce an average annual harvest of up to 1,200 crocodile skins in its fifth year of operation. Mechanisms exist to control the illegal trade in crocodilian products from countries that produce crocodile skins, and raw or tanned skins can be exported only from licensed farms, each with a non-reusable numbered tag supplied by CITES. Utilization of the meat, oil and glands could add an additional 30-50% in export value.

Development of buffer zones around protected wilderness areas can provide some compensation to communities who have lost traditional harvesting rights through the establishment of the reserve. Buffer zones in the National Chambal Sanctuary, which runs through central India, for example, can be opened up to local fishermen and farmers for limited harvesting of turtles and turtle eggs.

**T**he olive ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) is the commonest sea turtle on the East Coast of India. It produces on average 100 eggs at a time, nesting as many as two to three times a year. At Bhitarkanika and near the mouth of the Devi river in Orissa, the world's most important *arribadas* (nesting aggregations) of this species occur seasonally, where an estimated half a million turtles lay 50-100 million eggs annually.

The eggs of the olive ridley are nutritious, weighing about 23.5 to 34 gm each. Prior to the establishment of the sanctuary at Gahirmatha in 1975, eggs were collected from the rookery after payment of *anda-kara* (egg tax) to the Kanika *zamindars* (landlords) and subsequently to the Orissa Forest

Department, for sale to the economically poorer communities along the rivers Brahmini, Baitarani and Dhamra, as also for export to the Calcutta markets. The legal egg consumption per year is estimated to be as high as 1.5 million, with the actual number almost certainly being much higher. Issuing of licenses ceased in 1975 with the declaration of Bhitarkanika as a wildlife sanctuary, and the personnel of the Forest Department prevented all egg-collectors from entering the reserve.

**T**he low hatch reported from wild nests in Gahirmatha was attributed to the selection of nests that are located at the low and mid beach zone. Being close to the spring high tide line, it resulted in loss of nests due to erosion. Sea water is known to cause suffocation of the developing embryos and disrupt egg metabolism. Thus, an animal resource that is a protein-rich food has been lost. Studies need to be undertaken to examine the feasibility of a limited harvest of turtle eggs from ridley beaches where erosion destroys nests and/or where re-nesting later in the season exposes eggs laid earlier (it should be noted that the second nesting does not take place in some years). Removal of eggs should only be for local consumption from sites well below the known erosion points. It should be carefully supervised by the personnel of the Forest Department.

In the end, truly sustainable projects concerned with wild resources can succeed only through the efforts of relevant government departments, NGOs and especially the target community. Community involvement is the key to the sustainable development projects suggested and agendas should include the viewpoints and aspirations of the common man.

# Wildlife research

R J RANJIT DANIELS

AS I began to write this article, my attention was drawn to an American poster on conservation of 'nongame wildlife' with a picture of a frog sitting on a leaf! Although by this distinction lesser vertebrates such as amphibians get included, the term wildlife is still used in a restricted sense.

Wildlife, in general, stands for certain vertebrate animals – mammals, birds and larger reptiles. Take for example the US Fish and Wildlife Service. From the title it is clear that fish are not automatically treated as wildlife. Or, consider the renaming of World Wildlife Fund as Worldwide Fund for Nature. People are a little touchy about using the word wildlife to cover the entire spectrum of macro organisms – plants, invertebrates and vertebrates. Wildlife is apparently represented by a smaller component of the earth's biological diversity, at least in common sense. And, wildlife wardens continue to be people who are not trained to conserve medicinal plants or ants!

The rather narrow definition of wildlife has also restricted the sphere within which wildlife biology is

taught and researched in India. Students who obtain degrees in wildlife biology rarely choose to work on invertebrates and lower vertebrates (fish, amphibians and smaller reptiles). For a majority of Indian students, wildlife research is a source of adventure and excitement. It is certainly more exciting to track down and radio-collar a snow leopard or an ibex in the Greater Himalayas than study the social behaviour of bonnet macaques in the suburbs of Peninsular India. Nevertheless, much of the adventure and excitement is at the expense of adequate sample size and consistent data for meaningfully interpreting field observations in wildlife research.

Adventure does complement good science. But it demands more time, money, appropriate methodology and infrastructure. As such, the progress of wildlife research in India has been severely handicapped by all these constraints. Research projects are of short duration (mostly 3 years, rarely 5 years at a stretch) and inadequately financed. The sad result is that researchers are forced to make

compromises in adopting field techniques. The best techniques are not practical under these constraints. The situation is further worsened by lack of infrastructure (especially in universities) and the difficulty in obtaining the required permits from the government to undertake the study.

**T**oday, in India, we require a permit to collect even a frog from within a protected area. How much does it take to radio-collar a tiger? The use of radio-collars in wildlife research, even on a limited scale, involving just a handful of species of large mammals, has for the first time provided authentic data on habitat use, territory size and home range. Some data have been obtained on patterns of mating as well. With great difficulty a tiger or an elephant can be radio-collared. But this unfortunately happens towards the end of the project. And as the projects come to a close, animals carrying live radio-collars can be seen wandering about without being monitored for valuable data.

Estimates of wildlife population in the past had largely been arrived at (and continue to be) through indirect means. The use of spoor (pug and hoof-marks), scats, trails/tracks, nests and other clues permit a wide range of estimates of population size of such animals as large snakes, crocodiles, turtles, birds and mammals. Although the magnitude of error in such estimates has not been worked out on a case by case basis, except for tigers when pugmark census is used, it is often claimed that these indirect methods are among the most reliable means of wildlife population estimation.

Direct methods of population estimation have relied on the use of line transects, mark-release-recapture of animals, and photographs for individual identification, especially the

use of camera traps at night. Whereas many wildlife researchers favour mark-release-recapture as a method for reliably estimating population size (also movements and longevity), it is complicated by the issue of obtaining permits to trap, handle and mark animals.

To cut a long story short, I wish to rather rudely highlight the sad conditions that wildlife research in India is conducted. Data accumulated are frequently opportunistic and hence inconsistent between observations and observers; not substantiated by cross-checking using alternate or complimentary methodology; not amenable to stringent statistical analysis; and limited to a handful of animal species and sites for which permits are more readily issued. They are, thus, of little value (with exceptions) to conservation planning.

**T**he sorry state of the knowledge of wildlife populations in India came to light after a series of Conservation and Management Plan (CAMP) workshops that were held countrywide, covering a range of organisms. With few exceptions, there is a dearth of reliable data on population and status of even such well-studied components of wildlife as birds in our country. About a year ago, I had the privilege of seeing the largest bird database in the country – the data accumulated over the years by the bird ringing programmes of the Bombay Natural History Society. This large database, unfortunately, is the best example to illustrate the first three types of shortcomings, listed above, that the data on Indian wildlife has consistently suffered from. It may well be argued that much of the bird ringing data – the data is of the mark-release-recapture type – was collected at a time when quantitative study of wildlife was not given importance in India. Nevertheless,

what is to be lamented is the fact that despite the tremendous transition (qualitative to quantitative) that Indian wildlife research has undergone in the recent years, these shortcomings have not been addressed and overcome.

**W**ildlife conservation relies on the data sources that research builds up. However, in India, the channel between wildlife research and conservation is a bit too clogged. How many of our conservation efforts, plans and design are based on primary data? It is true that most of our wildlife reserves were designed *ad hoc* due to a perceived urgency. But, what efforts have been made by the wildlife managers to redesign, modify or alter the existing management systems based on the recommendations that wildlife research in the country has produced?

On occasions, such as when seeking permits to do research, well meaning forest officers cite various thesis, reports and publications on Indian wildlife, and retort by asking: who wants to know the time activity budget of otters? Can we not study wild dogs without radio-collaring them? Is it absolutely essential to collect frogs for identification? This is simply duplication of work already done! This is a clear indication of a wide gap between research and the needs of wildlife management.

The gap between wildlife research and conservation in India needs to be bridged. This can happen only when the managers (the Forest Department) and policy-makers are able to see the purpose and validity of both the research and the recommendations. Articles on population decline and its possible consequences on the genetic structure of mega animals such as tigers, lions and others appear in science magazines



and journals from time to time, offering recommendations for improved management. Yet, how much of this is based on first-hand scientific data? Are we not relying on general wisdom derived from the global arena? Isn't this why many of the conservation and management strategies are in conflict with the local situation and realities?

**W**hile it cannot be denied that (at least in India) prejudice can preclude the applied value of good research in wildlife conservation, it does help when we make a distinction between what is purely academic research and that which has immediate applied value. By purely academic, I mean research that is targeted towards a publication in high impact international journals which insist on results being novel, and of wider interest. Examples of such research can be those exploring the scope of using radio isotopes in estimating the age of elephant bones, the use of traces of DNA in animal faeces for identifying individuals (and thus the genetic variability in a population), identifying the source of confiscated crocodile skins based on DNA samples and the like.

Frankly, while not denying that such research does have considerable applied value, I am unable to see the immediate use of these research findings in conserving Indian wildlife. This feeling is not uniquely mine. It is more widespread in the country than we imagine. And as more and more wildlife biologists graduate in this country and with a decline in per capita funds available for research, there is an urgent need for serious rethinking on what is high priority wildlife research.

Prioritisation of wildlife research is possible only after some concerted stock-taking is done. Hundreds of postgraduate and doctoral theses

on wildlife lie scattered all over the country. What do these theses contain?

**O**ne of India's widely read newspapers (The Hindu, 13.3.98) carried an article on the decline of tigers worldwide. It stated that the reason for killing tigers is not known! A couple of recent news articles highlighted the plight of elephants in Periyar. That there are more females, 100-120 females to every male elephant, in the reserve was a major concern. What will be an appropriate research and management design that will help conserve this population of elephants? Shouldn't these be issues that draw the immediate attention of wildlife biologists and managers?

The other problem commonly encountered in India is that wildlife research undertaken by different researchers and institutions rarely complements each other. For instance, we may consider research on the Indian elephant. Probably the most detailed study of any large mammal in India is that of the elephant. I know of three independent researchers who have worked at more or less the same time in a small area, often encountering the same herd! The results and conclusions drawn from these studies, however, were not quite complementary. Sadly, no serious effort was made to openly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the different field methods adopted in the studies and draw generally acceptable inferences that could be of help in the management of elephants in South India.

There are numerous such examples of conflicts between Indian wildlife researchers (although this is not unique to wildlife biology) that offer further scope for wildlife managers and policy-makers to criticise researchers and take their own course of action when it comes to conservation.

A transition from a hard approach of studying only megavertebrates under the banner of wildlife to including lesser organisms is taking place in India. Whether this is result of genuine concern for lesser animals or due to pressures of funding is not readily apparent. It is certain that most funding agencies in India do not encourage studies which exclusively deal with megavertebrates. Whatever be the reason, as mentioned earlier, wildlife biologists are beginning to include the study of insects in their array of choice organisms and this is an encouraging development.

**T**he transition has unfortunately also had some unexpected consequences. It seems that the scientific standards for wildlife research in the country are to be further compromised. Biologists with very specialised training in research and conservation of large mammals and other megavertebrates such as crocodiles have had to co-ordinate and monitor projects that primarily deal with the field study of insects, amphibians and other lesser animals. The result is that there have been methodological complications, including the most fundamental, relating to identification of species. A greater reliance on secondary sources of support in taxonomy for the identification of lesser animals has often driven students of wildlife biology to disregard their research guides.

Statistical and computer applications in wildlife research has become the ultimate tool to a wide range of students in the country. Students of wildlife biology casually ask for help in statistical analysis and interpretation of data, often insisting that ANOVA is done irrespective of what the data is! When queried, they justify it by stating, 'My research guide wants it.'

Wildlife research which once suffered from methodological con-

straints is now going through a phase of ad hoc adoption of methodology. Few institutions that offer courses in wildlife biology also teach research methodology that is relevant. Rarely does a student carefully plan his field study with an awareness of the limitations of existing 'standard' methodology and the relevant statistical techniques for analysing the data. The normal practise is to first design a study according to one's convenience, and at the end of the study to look for available statistical tools to analyse and interpret the data.

**W**hat is happening in the field? It is heartening to see wildlife research graduating from natural history to more quantitative studies of population structure and dynamics. The use of line transects to estimate population size of selected species of animals is becoming popular. Quite a few Indian researchers are now familiar with the statistical packages that aid in the analysis and interpretation of population data obtained using line transects. However, it is the over-reliance on such tools that is troubling. The line transects help to estimate of population sizes of individual species only after certain basic assumptions are made. Assumptions such as 'the animal does not move in response to the observer', are rather hard to swallow. While there are procedures to correct some of the biases that creep in while conducting a field-census, rarely do students/researchers take care not to violate some of the basic requirements of the programme. The most commonly violated norm while conducting transect census in the field is not maintaining a straight line. Such a deviation can lead to violating other norms, that no animal is counted twice and so on.

The case of using line transects is only illustrative. Several such tools,

available for field studies in wildlife, are used in India by students/researchers. The unfortunate fact is, that a number of ad hoc adjustments/modifications made to the standard tool are never treated with caution while analysing the data using a computer package. 'Junk in, junk out', although a very popular phrase among wildlife biologists, has to a large extent failed to sensitise field researchers.

Research methods often promoted as 'standard' internationally need not always be applicable in our country. They often need to be appropriately modified to suit the species of our choice, the habitat, the observers' skills, time available, levels of visibility, and the manpower/infrastructure. There is nothing wrong in this. However, failing to acknowledge this and feeding the data thus collected into a standard pre-fabricated computer package and interpreting the results in consultation with prevailing knowledge is dangerous. While such problems are not unique to wildlife biology, errors due to observer bias tend to get magnified more readily in field data than in laboratory experiments.

**W**ildlife research and conservation in India must clearly identify priorities. The first step towards meaningful management of wildlife is to broaden its definition to highlight the fact that megavertebrates are components of a much larger biological system. This is already happening, with students of wildlife biology currently taking interest in butterflies, insect pollinators, corals, amphibians and small reptiles. While it is heartening to see the transition, the progress in wildlife research is slowed down more by lack of appropriate design and methodology than the availability of funds. In fact, a carefully designed study is fundamental to the

most economical use of the available funds and manpower. A vast majority of us (wildlife researchers and managers) need to be trained in this regard.

**W**ildlife conservation is a mission and cannot stop with an academic breakthrough. Every effort should be made to validate research findings through appropriate alternate methodology and economically utilising financial and human resources. Wildlife research and management should be interdisciplinary and integrated. Such programmes should attract long-term national or international funding. Long-term conservation programmes should have their objectives clearly stated, priorities defined, design worked out, and research methodology appropriately adapted and executed. An appropriate research methodology, in my opinion, is the principal factor that can bridge the gap between wildlife research, management and conservation in India.

Wildlife conservation can be effective only when authentic, time-tested research findings are applied. Snapshot recommendations and an excessive dependence on common wisdom derived from the global knowledge pool can be misleading. Time and again we read of megavertebrates and their population decline. At the same time research papers in scientific journals (*Current Science*, vol. 73, 1997, p. 841) claim that, 'The tiger and Asian lion are making news all over the world. All is not lost; the good news is that both are fast breeders.' How sure are we? Does this happen in the wild? Who has the data? Just another example of common wisdom prevailing over scientific reason. Little wonder that wildlife research and conservation in this country are only limping along.

# A great legacy dissipated

M. KRISHNAN

TO have a fair idea of the present worth of our wildlife preserves (of all kinds: sanctuaries, national parks and other protected habitats) and to know what further steps need to be taken to effectively safeguard our heritage of nature, it is necessary to take a quick, overall look at the past. Many of these preserves were set up long before Independence, in British India and in the princely states – well-known examples are Vedanthangal in Tamil Nadu, Bandipur in Karnataka and Corbett Park (our first authentic national park, set up in 1934) in Uttar Pradesh.

Soon after the *shikar* statutes that followed Independence, the Indian Board for Wild Life was constituted, a number of fresh preserves were created (some quite major ones) and conservation tightened. Illustrative examples of this are the metamorphosis of Keola Deo Ghana at Bharatpur in Rajasthan from a wildfowlers' paradise into the most important water-bird sanctuary in Asia in

1956, the Point Calimere and Anaimalai sanctuaries of Tamil Nadu, and the intensification of conservation in the Gir Forest of Gujarat (the last home of the Asiatic lion) and in Kaziranga in Assam (the major stronghold of the Indian rhinoceros and the no less Indian wild buffalo). The trend has been continued right into the present: Sultanpur Jheel in Haryana, another favourite resort of wildfowlers, was converted into a fine sanctuary recently and the ambitious Desert National Park of Rajasthan was initiated earlier this year.

We now have almost 150 wildlife preserves, big and small, all over India. But neither the old nor the new preserves have taken note of the basic fact that the wild vegetation is as integral and vital a part of the wildlife of any region as its fauna. In 1970, with the acceptance by the central government of the definition of 'wildlife' as the entire uncultivated flora and fauna of a tract, this profound truth gained formal official recognition – it still awaits recognition in the field. In fact, our wildlife preserves have all been set up solely for the larger animals, and a few for water-birds, and the flora has been considered purely incidental, as providing cover and

\*Reprinted courtesy of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 24 August 1980.

Though written nearly two decades ago, Krishnan's overview of the history and prospects of wildlife conservation in India remains relevant.

fodder, and the lesser life not considered at all.

Hydel projects have been sited close by, even right inside, some of the best preserves. With a few exceptions, diverse forestry operations (all highly destructive of the natural vegetation) are carried on in our preserves, with even the supply of raw materials at subsidised rates to industries from them undertaken: cattle grazing, the collection of firewood and forest produce and other human activities are permitted, motor roads intersect the preserves, and human traffic on foot (highly unsettling to the wild animals) allowed. All our wildlife habitats (including all preserves) are solely in charge of our various governments: naturally, then the responsibility for protection is entirely theirs, and even otherwise only governments have the sanction necessary for protection. It follows, inescapably, that by their permissiveness, our governments have been the chief depredators of our wildlife.

**A**ctual, factual evidence as proof of every generalisation made so far in this overall survey of the past is on record, but the detailing of even selected examples of such proof will take up this entire issue of the *Weekly*, and the rest of the brief space available to me is needed for constructive suggestions for the future. But before going on to them, let me comment on the outraged defence of their past policy and administration that governments are likely to raise on this criticism, that they have been preoccupied with more important things such as providing for the elemental needs of our growing populations and industries.

Yes, I do realise that they have had that Sisyphean task right from the start, but then all our preserves together constitute only about one per cent

of the total land area. Surely they could have provided for our populations and industries with the overwhelming percentage of the land not given over to wildlife at their disposal. Furthermore, conserving the wealth of nature we still have left is also an elemental national need: Much needs to be done towards more realistic conservation to rectify the apathy and wastefulness of the past, and it has to be done right now – to delay further is to be assured of not having enough worth the saving.

**T**hat is the counsel, not of despair but of hope. The depletion of the past 50 years has been staggering: places noted for their wildlife within my own recollection are now denuded and bare and their animals have declined to rarity, even to local extinction. But the wonderful, the heartening thing is this – in spite of everything, India is still second to no country in its wild fauna, and perhaps the richest in its flora. Though heavily depleted, our fauna is still there, and notably free from exotic introductions: that cannot be said of our exotics-ridden flora, but it will regain its pristine glory if conserved, that is, if left alone and allowed to regenerate.

The policy of leaving well alone and of manfully resisting the almost overpowering urge to improve on nature has been proved to be the best, actually the only sound policy in conservation. This was called trust in the balance of nature in the past, and is now termed total environmental conservation, and it will suffice to ensure the future of our wildlife. It means emancipating preserves of viable area from all forms of human exploitation, and the provision of strict protection (now sadly lacking) against human disturbance and depredation. That is all that is needed, but since natural regeneration is a slow process, pati-

ence and faith are also needed. Incidentally, it is only in the few reserves of Project Tiger that total environmental conservation is now being attempted, after a fashion.

**I**n the past decade, governmental cognisance of responsibility for the country's ravaged opulence of nature has displayed a certain nascent perception. The Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972 is constructive, if only for its insistence on a specific wildlife organisation in each state, and it is the first realistic attempt at a national policy of conservation. There are other tokens of awakening governmental concern for our wildlife, even of awakening public concern in a minority of our people, but for the next generation at least governments must bear the entire responsibility for protection.

Today, there is no informed popular interest in our culture, in our magnificent assets of nature. The human and natural curiosity of our children in the wild things around is sternly nipped in the bud by our traditions of life and instruction instead of being informed and stimulated. In the West, with a comparatively small store of wildlife, the great therapeutic value of such an interest in relieving the stresses and frustrations of civilised life has been fully appreciated after the last World War: wildlife recreation is widely organised and popular, and education at all levels features nature importantly. With no reliable natural history in the written or oral literatures of our languages, and no popular feeling for it, it will be no easy task to inform and stimulate this dormant interest in our people, particularly in the younger sections. But this is a vital national need and will endow future generations with a joy and sustenance in life that we have been without.

If I have only conveyed the impression so far that it is of national importance to conserve our wildlife and wildlife habitats, I have failed fundamentally in my argument. This is no matter of mere importance, but a primary patriotic duty, quite essential for the survival of the identity of this ancient country. Surely no country depends for its identity mainly on the conglomerate accretions of its cultural past or its mutable humanity – it depends overwhelming on its own peculiar physical integrity, its geomorphology and the flora and fauna that belong to it distinctively. Oddly enough, it is our poets and not our rulers or politicians who have realized this profound truth – it is they that have sung of our mountains and valleys and rivers, sounding seas and vast coastlines, great forests and lovely flowers, and of our birds and beasts.

The dissipation of India's physical integrity has now reached the stage where further indiscriminate demands on its natural resources will certainly erode its very identity. For this reason, it is imperative that adequate tracts, typical of the country's quiddity, should be freed from human exploitation and protected efficiently. Only that can ensure the continuance of India's identity. With our vast populations and growing industrialisation, it will be unrealistic to ask for much territory even for this vital national purpose, but a modest five per cent of the total land area should suffice, in the circumstances. Naturally, this will include all existing wildlife preserves, so that no further demands need be made on our forests; for the rest it will embrace notable geomorphological features and areas not provided for so far in our wildlife effort, such as swamps, estuaries, offshore islands, mountain tops and, by no means last, adequate expanses of plains for the wildlife of the open country, now so sadly lacking sanctuary.

## Fatal links

VALMIK THAPAR

'WHY can't we save the tiger? Why can't we save our parks? What is the problem?' I am endlessly asked. Rhetorical questions, but how many of us understand the mechanisms that are supposed to *govern* wildlife?

Because of a preferred ignorance about nature and her ways, wildlife conservation has become a dirty word for most people. A mere mention sets off a furious debate about 'elite armchair conservationists', 'eco-fascism', 'people's rights', 'deprivation of tribals', or forest dwellers' 'indigenous cultures' and much more. While this battle between different lobbies

rages, a part the wildlife and wilderness of this country vanish each year.

Sadly, the reason is that we are engulfed by an ignorance of the value of nature. Whether politician, bureaucrat, conservationist, NGO, tribal, villager or activist—everyone is obsessed with the jargon and fashions that encompass the processes of keeping alive the great storehouses of natural treasures in our country.

**F**ew go beyond the jargon. The concepts that governed sacred groves are being lost forever. For most politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen ignorance is bliss since it makes it easier to exploit the natural treasury. Everyone has a rationale, everyone has a solution, everyone justifies their lobbies and vested interests, but few serve the cause of nature or wildlife. Few care that endless rivers are born in the tiger's forests and that these tiger habitats are probably the most important water catchment areas left in the country. Hundreds of rivers, rivulets, streams, *nallahs* are born in wildlife areas and serve the essential purpose of providing life to millions of people in their vicinity.

Few know that national parks cover only one per cent of India's land mass and not even these are inviolate. The laws that govern our natural resources are continuously flouted. Few care that the fragments of natural treasures that remain are some of the most vital reservoirs of medicinal knowledge known to man. Few care about our priceless wilderness. Even the so-called sensible activists who propogate the involvement of local communities in the management of our protected areas are ignorant of the ground realities.

Most people have their personal agendas. And as the debates rage, the wilderness gets looted and pillaged. For those who exploit, it is a moment

to swallow more and more of these treasures, which are not only easily convertible into cash but probably so valuable that some would call them priceless. It is one of India's greatest tragedies that because of this preferred ignorance no consensus is reached on conservation, making it convenient for those who rule. They have set a perfect stage to pick and plunder at their whim and fancy. It is done on the excuse of so called 'development'—a word used as a guise to cover every exploitative activity. Let us look at the actual working of the system's involved in wildlife conservation and try and understand how this depletion of our natural treasury occurs.

To reveal the inability of both the Centre and state governments to function in the interest of wildlife, I will examine in detail the example of one state. Madhya Pradesh is supposed to have excellent forest cover, the maximum number of tigers in India and, on paper, the political will to translate policy into field action. M.P. had nearly 30% of forest cover and 15% of the world's tigers. From the period starting 1992, I will try and highlight specific examples of policy and decision-making.

**I**n 1992, the minister for environment and forests was closely linked to the man who was to be the future chief minister of Madhya Pradesh. They could have been the most effective duo for protecting the natural heritage of Madhya Pradesh. Our story starts in 1992, when a tract of forest that fell in the minister's constituency was declared a Project Tiger reserve. One thought that the minister would set an example and make Pench a model for our tiger reserves. I had just been appointed to the steering committee of Project Tiger and was beginning to learn the ways of the system that govern the natural heritage of this country.

Fishing was prohibited in Pench as it was a national park and therefore covered by the Wildlife Protection Act (1972). The following clause of the act applied to the area:

'No person shall destroy, exploit, or remove any wildlife from a National Park, or destroy or damage the habitat of any wild animal, or deprive any wildlife animal of its habitat within such National Park except under and in accordance with a permit granted by the Chief Wildlife Warden and no such permit shall be granted unless the state government, being satisfied that such destruction, exploitation, or removal of wildlife from the National Park is necessary for the improvement and better management of wildlife therein, authorises the issue of such permit.'

**B**ut we have become masters of using the law and the grey areas in it, and the above clause 35(6) of the Wildlife Protection Act has been much abused. In this case a joint secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forests initiated a process and faxed the principal forest secretary of Madhya Pradesh, stating in relation to the rights of fishermen:

'As per information available in this ministry, the aforesaid formalities have not been duly completed in respect of Pench National Park and the final notification is yet to issue. If so, fishing rights of the local people cannot be abridged without compensation and lawful acquisition and would have to be continued till the formalities laid down for acquisition of rights are completed.'

This fax message was like a missile for the state government and they must have wondered if the *makers of the law* were turning into the *breakers of the law*. After all, everyone knew that it was only 10 years ago that a dam was constructed in the area and 50 sq km of forest cleared for the

water reservoir in the heart of the national park. Since this was so recent, there was no question of any traditional fisherman or traditional fishing rights in this entire expanse. But the central government had opened up a hornets nest as far as the issue of rights was concerned and questioned the very basis of the national park. It was all about the millions of dollars worth of fish in the water reservoir and every fishing mafia in India wanted their bite of flesh, whether through 'traditional' fishing rights or any other way. The lobbies had begun to work, taking their cue from the Ministry of Environment and Forests' first message.

**F**or over two years this issue went back and forth between central and state government, since to permit fishing under the laws of this country was not easy. Towards the end of 1993, a new chief minister of Madhya Pradesh was in the saddle. But in the interim the minister of environment and forests made all the right noises.

In September 1992 he wrote to the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh:

'Madhya Pradesh can boast of the single largest population of tigers in the world (more than 900), which constitutes one-fourth of the country's, and one-sixth of the world's wild population of tiger. Three-fourth of the 45 districts have substantial forest cover. Madhya Pradesh could rightly be called the "Tiger State".

I have been discussing this with some experts, including members of the Steering Committee of Project Tiger and other wildlife lovers. I feel that we could develop a whole new approach for the conservation of biological diversity and natural resources, as well as the socio-economic development of people, particularly tribals and forest dwellers in Madhya Pradesh by using tiger conservation as a means.'

We have become masters of rhetoric. The chief minister accepted the concept and created a tiger state committee, to which I was appointed, to work out a detailed strategy paper. By 1995 the process was well underway – Madhya Pradesh was declared the tiger state and was to adopt all-round policies friendly to tigers, including setting up a tiger cell which was formed at the police headquarters to deal with poaching and illegal trade.

**A** lot of excellent rhetoric spewed out over the next year. Both the minister of environment and forests and the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh wrote splendid responses on different issues, but it was all paper work without any field action. To a detailed proposal prepared by a colleague and myself on what the tiger state should be doing, the chief minister responded:

'I thankfully acknowledge receipt of your joint letter dated 5 September 1995. The concern expressed in your letter, certainly, strengthens our resolve to intensify the efforts in the protection and preservation of wildlife and particularly of the tiger in Madhya Pradesh. Due to limitations of financial resources, I understand that some of the recommendations made by the Tiger State Committee could not be implemented so far. However, arrangements are being made to provide better communication facilities such as fax machine in the office of the Addl. PCCF (Wildlife). Wireless sets have already been provided to the National Parks. The authorisation for the use of fire arms by the forest staff in sensitive areas are being examined, on priority. The formation of the Tiger Cell in the PHQ and the co-ordinated efforts being made by the police and the forest officers at the field level have turned the heat on the poachers. We intend to keep up this pressure without any relent. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Madhya

Pradesh informs me that the next meeting of the Tiger State Committee is being planned in October 1995. This forum should enable you to interact more closely with the other members of the committee as well as officers of the forest and police departments in giving further shape to the anti-poaching drive. I look forward to your continued support on this noble cause and welcome suggestions for improving our approach in this endeavour.'

We only managed to get one fax machine for the chief wildlife warden's office!

**T**he Union minister also gave some splendid suggestions to the chief minister. In a letter in May 1995 he stated:

'Here are some immediate steps we could take.

(a) dramatically step up intelligence, patrolling and arrests to force the gangs to suspend operations till we have time to regroup our efforts to stamp out the menace;

(b) place all known and habitual wildlife poachers under arrest and oppose their release on bail;

(c) consult with the Chief Wildlife Warden before transfer of any forest or police officer serving in a tiger area, or involved with the M.P. Tiger State Committee, because sometimes, by pure coincidence, a transfer takes place immediately after a seizure and this conveys the wrong signal that the poaching mafia has influence in high places;

(d) consult the Law Department on the possibility of codification of firearms for forest staff so that the 800 weapons lying in the armouries can be used by them against poachers. We should also instruct them to brief us on the feasibility of enhancing punishment in the acts to a minimum of ten years of imprisonment, making the offence non-bailable. I am instructing my officers

to advise me along the same lines for central legislation;

(e) issue instructions to all territorial DFO's and CF's about prioritising the protection of the tiger. CWLW must be authorised to make entries in the confidential report of these personnel, in addition to the normal channels;

(f) allot four HF frequencies to the Wildlife Wing for better communication, and two DFO's and three ACF's must be posted at the CWLW office in Bhopal for anti-poaching and strengthening tiger management;

(g) resource mobilisation must be immediately begun, particularly to acquire vehicles, fire-protection equipment and for reward schemes for informers.

On my part, I have immediately instituted similar steps at the Centre and will see to it that co-ordinated action is taken by the Tiger Crisis Cell at the Centre and the Tiger Cell of Madhya Pradesh. The back of the poaching gangs must be broken within the next four weeks, but I would like to ensure that the focus does not fall merely on the weakest link which happens to be the adivasis who actually use the poison or traps. We must get to the very top, or at least break the transport and trade links between Mandla, Jabalpur, Balaghat and Seoni.

**U**nfortunately, all of the above remained hot air. Meanwhile, the 'fishing' issue resurfaced and against the advice of the entire steering committee of Project Tiger, the boss of wildlife in India, the additional IGF (wildlife) wrote a letter to the principal forest secretary of M.P. in January 1995:

'We have been receiving several representations from people engaged in fishing in the Totladoh reservoir of Pench Tiger Reserve (soon to be declared as national park). The complaints are of two types:

On the other hand, it would not be appropriate to snatch away certain activities of hill and poor people, which may ultimately help in the improvement of bio-diversity of the protected area so that the traditional atmosphere of conflict between the park management and the local residents be replaced by a more co-operative interface.

The solutions to be adopted would, of course, have to be location-specific; in different sanctuaries and parks, the problems would be different; the bio-diversity would be different, the priorities would be different, and therefore, the solutions too would differ.

In the Pench Tiger Reserve, the Totladoh reservoir is an artificial one created due to the completion of a dam downstream about 8 years ago. This is not an *in situ* lake. So if any use of bio-resource of the pond could ultimately help in the improvement and better management of the reserve, by reducing their dependence on illegal felling of trees and poaching of wild animals, and also increasing the interface of local people with the park authorities — this may be explored as envisioned in Section 35(6) of the Wildlife Protection Act.

Note that the boss of Indian wildlife was now not even calling the Pench Tiger Reserve a national park. He was talking of a 50 sq km reservoir as a pond and in writing he was asking the state government to explore the *loopholes* in 35(6) of the Wildlife Protection Act.

**O**ver the next six months many members of the steering committee of Project Tiger wrote letters opposing this move. But the then director, Project Tiger failed to support his steering committee. At an evening function, he went up to the minister and remarked, 'I am glad fishing will commence in the tiger reserve — the World Bank will welcome it.' Since

part of the reservoir falls in neighbouring Maharashtra, the Government of Maharashtra took legal opinion and wrote to the state of Madhya Pradesh objecting to the entire happening:

'In 1975 the Government of Maharashtra vide its resolution No. PGS-1375/121748-F1 dt. 22/11/1975 has declared its intention to constitute an area of 257.26 sq kms as a national park to be known as Pench National Park. The area of submergence as explained in (1) above is included in this notification. The Law and Judiciary Department of Government of Maharashtra has given the opinion that all the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 apply to the intended national park also.

The provisions of the Indian Forest Act 1927, and The Wildlife Protection Act 1972, in relation to fishing in the reserved forest and national park, respectively, are as follows: As per 26(d) of the IFA, trespassing in a reserved forest is prohibited. As per 26(i) of the IFA, fishing in reserved forest is prohibited. As per section 65(A) of the IFA, offences under section (i) are non-bailable. As per section 23 of the IFA, no prescriptive rights accrue over reserved forest except by succession etc.

As per section 35(3) read with section (20) of The Wildlife Protection Act 1972, after the issue of notification of intended national park, no fresh rights accrue over such area. As per section 35(6) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, destruction or removal of any wildlife or destruction or damage to habitat of any wild animal is prohibited except the activity beneficial to wildlife management.

From the above clarifications it would become clear that the submergence area of the reservoir is not only a reserved forest but is also a part of intended Pench National Park. Therefore fishing in the reservoir becomes violative of the provisions of both, the Indian Forest Act 1927 and the Wildlife Pro-



tection Act 1972, and is liable for final action under both the Acts.'

**B**ut none of this was of any use and on 30 May 1996 the chief wildlife warden of M.P. issued an order granting 305 fishing permits in the heart of the Pench Tiger Reserve. In his order he stated that he had been instructed by the chief minister to do so. The Maharashtra government once again strongly opposed this move, stating that the Madhya Pradesh government's interpretation of the Wildlife Protection Act was different from theirs. As a result two rules applied to the same water reservoir in which no fishing was permitted in Maharashtra while fishing was permitted in Madhya Pradesh. It was the perfect recipe for the mafia to force open the entire area and stir the activists into demanding their fishing rights. All the vested interests in exploiting the area had been perfectly massaged into action.

From the Centre, even the office of Project Tiger bent over backwards to use the grey areas and rationalise the 'fishing rights' of poor people. My opposition to this move was not appreciated and a senior official in the ministry whispered, 'District records can always be tampered with to create fishing rights.' I could not believe it. Suddenly the minister changed. I continued my opposition to what had happened in Pench and on the basis of my letter, the same boss of wildlife (now under a different minister) wrote to the principal secretary of forests, Madhya Pradesh:

'I am not sure about the authenticity of the statement made by the CWLW, Madhya Pradesh. I understand a large part of Pench Tiger Reserve is a reserved forest, and in a reserved forest no right of any individual can exist unless the same is recorded at the time of reservation process. Such record or

reference is normally reflected in the volume-I of the working plan prescription in the chapter that deals with rights and concessions of the local people. It may, thus be indicated whether any such right was recorded in the Pench Reserved Forest at the time of constitution of the reserved forest.

The demand for fishing in Pench is mostly coming after the Pench dam was constructed, may be about 10 or 15 years back. I am sure that such demands cannot be age old as the reservoir was not in existence earlier. So even if the final notification of the national park is pending and the process under section 19-26 of Wildlife Protection Act is yet to be gone through, the control of rights can easily be made with reference to the records of the working plan and admission or inadmission of such rights at the time of constitution of the reservation of forest, pending final notification of the national park.

Minister, Environment and Forest has pursued the note of CWLW, M.P. dated 10 July 1996 and he has observed that the remarks are evasive and ambiguous. I would, therefore, request you to furnish a specific reply in this regard within 10 August 1996 after which the case will again be placed to Minister, Environment and Forests for his orders.'

**T**he same officer under a different minister had taken a somersault, but this time the M.P. government was not going to be caught with its pants down. In a tough reply to the ministry (the first of its kind in ministry records) the additional secretary forests of M.P. wrote to the boss of wildlife, the additional IGF (wildlife):

'The perusal of the above letter makes it abundantly clear that the matter of traditional rights of fisherman was raised for the first time by the Government of India and it was at the specific

instructions of the Government of India that the state government examined the matter in the light of Section 35(6) of the Wildlife (Conservation) Act, 1972. For ready reference a copy of fax dt. 15/7/92 of Joint Secretary, GOI, Mr. S.S. Hasurkar and your letter dt. 17.1.1995 is enclosed herewith. It is clear from the perusal of these letters at that point of time, the state government was in favour of stopping fishing in Pench National Park area and was acting accordingly. But the state was compelled to change this stand due to GOI's instructions.'

**A** similar letter went from the chief wildlife warden to Project Tiger Delhi. Because of the differences between the Centre and state, and the inter-state problems over the use of the reservoir, the matter ended up in the Supreme Court. Everybody was against fishing – the state wildlife advisory board, the steering committee of Project Tiger and many other NGO's. As the Supreme Court debated the issues, activist organisations joined hands in support of fishing and the poor fishermen appeared in and out of court. The mafia lobbies, politicians and bureaucrats were thrilled that the tribal organisations stood on the same platform as them. I remember a senior aide in the minister's office telling me: 'You see now how others can be engaged to fight the battle.'

In all this confusion, the Supreme Court supported Maharashtra's ban on fishing, but permitted 305 fishing permits to continue in Madhya Pradesh till the final notification of the area. They also made a long list of stringent conditions under which fishing could be done. Now India had one large reservoir declared as a national park, administered by two state governments, in which fishing was banned in one half of the area and permitted in the other half! India's

Wildlife Protection Act had been interpreted in two different ways for the same stretch of water.

**T**he field director of Pench Tiger Reserve and his deputy were transferred for having done their duty to control illegal fishing. The new director of Project Tiger objected to the transfer, but now the state government was in no mood to listen to the central government. And though the Supreme Court had asked for immediate final notification of the area, two years later nothing has happened. In fact, there is immense pressure by fishing mafias on the Maharashtra government to open up the area to fishing, following the precedent of Madhya Pradesh. It is one big mess.

Another public interest litigation concerning Madhya Pradesh went before the Supreme Court of India. The case concerned the collection of minor forest produce in protected areas. The court was very clear about wildlife matters:

'The matter, however, does not rest there. The petitioner contends that the forest cover in the state of Madhya Pradesh is gradually shrinking. As pointed out earlier, there is a shrinkage to the extent of 145 sq km between 1991 and 1993. In our country, the total forest cover is far less than the ideal minimum of one-third of the total land. We cannot, therefore, afford any further shrinkage in the forest cover in our country. If one of the reasons for this shrinkage is the entry of villagers and tribals living in and around the sanctuaries and the national parks, there can be no doubt that urgent steps must be taken to prevent any destruction or damage to the environment, the flora and fauna and wildlife in those areas. If the only reason which compels the state government to permit entry and collection of *tendu* leaves is not having acquired the rights of villagers/

tribals and having failed to locate any area for their rehabilitation, we think that inertia in this behalf cannot be tolerated. We are, therefore, of the opinion that while we do not quash the order of 28.3.1995, we think that the state government must be directed to decide on the question of completing the process for issuing final notifications and then take urgent steps to complete the procedure for declaring/notifying the areas as sanctuaries and national parks under section 26A and 35 of the Act.

We, therefore, direct that the state government shall take immediate action under Chapter IV of the Act and institute an inquiry, acquire the rights of those who claim any right in or over any land proposed to be included in the sanctuary/national park, and thereafter proceed to issue a final notification under section 26A and 35 of the Act declaring such areas as sanctuaries/national parks.

We direct the state government to initiate action in this behalf within a period of six months from today and expeditiously conclude the same showing that sense of urgency as is expected of a state government in such matters as enjoined by Article 48A of the Constitution and at the same time keeping in view the duty enshrined in Article 51A(g) of the Constitution. We are sure, and we have no reason to doubt, that the state government would show the required zeal to expeditiously declare and notify the areas as sanctuaries/national parks.'

**Y**ears later no one is bothered by time deadlines or expeditious declarations and final notifications. Such are the priorities even after Supreme Court orders. There is little progress or urgency in final notifications. This delay keeps open the possibility of never ending exploitation of the forests of Madhya Pradesh by vested interests.

Madhya Pradesh has had the highest number of poachers caught, skins seized, and most of our poaching gangs operate across the state. Several hundred skins of different animals have been seized in the state between 1991-1997, including dozens of tiger skins, and over 100 poachers have been arrested. The state today has no mechanism to function in the tiger's interest and the central government has little interest in the entire happening. The tiger cell at the police headquarters desperately needs funds that are never allocated, such that its effectiveness is totally neutralised.

**T**he gravity of poaching was driven home to me when in 1995, at the height of the tiger crisis, a minister who 'served' the forests of India was given a gift from well-wishers in his constituency, which happened to fall in a tiger reserve. The gift was a tiger skin! I realised that if such gifts could be presented to the powers that be, there was little chance to effectively save tigers in Madhya Pradesh. There were several cases of the rich and politically powerful poaching, or their kin violating the sanctity of our laws.

Despite these problems plaguing the state, the government 'increased' the number of tigers in the 1997 census by 10, just to show progress. The great tragedy of this entire operation is evident from a letter the census co-ordinator wrote to his boss, the chief wildlife warden:

'As directed, the tiger/leopard population estimation figures received from the respective conservators, have been compiled along with the prey base and other related details. However, despite repeated requests, the pug mark tracings have been received only from a few circles. The circle-wise details are appended for ready reference. It is requested that the conservators may kindly be directed to keep a record of

the pug mark tracings pertaining to the estimation figures, as communicated by them, for future reference. In the absence of pug mark tracings from many circles, the tabulation being sent from this end amounts to a compilation only.'

**T**he so called tiger census, a game of numbers, was based on a methodology using the pugmark tracer. How could figures be even compiled without it? This reminds me of a time when the numbers of tigers, dead or alive, were a matter of much debate. I remember how a former director of Project Tiger addressed the tiger crisis cell, insisting that in the last 7 months only one tiger had been poached since this was the official information on the subject which had reached his table from India's bureaucratic maze. This figure was even placed before the Parliament.

But in these same years much more was afflicting the tiger state.

Under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has a forest conservation act committee (one of the most powerful in the Ministry of Environment and Forests) which considers proposals for the release of forest land. This committee had released 230,000 hectares of forest land in M.P. since 1980. It was, however, in the last 6-7 years, that the maximum release of forest (tiger habitat) has taken place—160,000 hectares—for mines, dams, army firing ranges, irrigation projects or legalising encroachments.

The tiger state leads all the states in the Union in its quest for diverting forest lands. Let us look at some of the terrible violations that have taken place. A request was made by the state to release 3,000 hectares of forest land for a hydro-electric project from the Shivpuri forest division. The proposal was examined and cleared by the

Ministry of Environment and Forests. After all, the original application for this clearance from Madhya Pradesh clearly stated that in 1994 the chief wildlife warden of the state considered the area to *have no wildlife of any significance*. Further, the divisional forest officer recommended the diversion, even though Rs 5 crore worth of trees were listed as the value. But, the matter was much more serious, since all these were official comments on a national park! The land in question included a portion of Madhav National Park. The M.P. government, instead of clarifying this in its original application, had only stated 'Shivpuri forest division', and legal status as 'P.F. and R.F'. (which means protected forest and reserved forest). No mention of the national park!

**N**early every fact sheet from Madhya Pradesh requesting the release of forest land states that 'wildlife is of no significance.' This is how the Forest Department serves our natural treasury. Little did the central government realise that 1,500 hectares of this land had been notified as Madhav National Park. I discovered this fact on a visit to look at a dam site and the violations taking place in construction work. They immediately tried to stop the release when I brought it to their notice. In a letter to me, the additional IGF (wildlife) wrote:

'It is revealed that the permission granted for transfer of forest land for Sindh, Mohini Sagar Phase-II Hydro Electric Project was obtained by the Madhya Pradesh government without informing that the land forms part of the national park. Once it came to the notice of the central government that the land proposed for transfer is within the national park, the project was rejected and the state government was asked to fix the responsibility against the erring official.'

But the Government of India had been totally fooled and in the intervening period the irrigation project had spent more than Rs 80 crore, damaging the forest land in question with just under 5,00,000 trees. Even today the state government is least bothered about the central government ban on the Sindh Phase II project, and continues its work in the national park and on forest land. One of the most serious violations of the laws that govern our natural heritage had been detected, but how many go undetected?

**S**o far as hydro-electric and river valley projects are concerned, Madhya Pradesh has a record of a 90% violation of all mandatory conditions that govern these mega projects. An endless stream of violations of the Environment Protection Act and the Forest Conservation Act litter the corridors of the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Though these violations have been recorded by the ministry's regional offices, no action has been taken to punish the offenders.

In the same Shivpuri forest division, other violations resulting from the permission to mine inside the national park have added fuel to the fire and degrade both forest and wildlife in the area. I strongly objected to the permission given by the ministry to operate seven mines in 930 hectares of park area inside the Madhav National Park. Please note that in a clever usage of words, both state government and the Ministry of Environment and Forests refer to the land as the 'proposed extension area of Madhav National Park'. Someone in the corridors of power had ingeniously coined a new phrase to describe a national park. There is no such thing as a proposed extension area of a national park. When it is convenient the same government that notifies a national park

can end up calling the park 'a proposed extension area.'

**M**y objection to the mining was based on a letter dated December 1995 from the ministry:

'Sub: (i) Renewal of mining lease over an area of 930,734 ha. of forest land in district Shivpuri. (ii) Permission for removal of existing material and completion of mining operations in the forest areas already broken up in respect of 7 mines within the *proposed extension area of Madhav National Park*.

Sir, I am directed to refer to the Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh D.O. letter No.4337/CMS/95 dated 1.11.95 addressed to the Minister (Environment and Forests) regarding above mentioned subject and to say that as a very special case this Ministry has decided to grant permission up to 31st March, 1996 only for removal of existing material and completion of mining operations in already broken up area in respect of 7 mines located in the proposed extension area of Madhav National Park subject to the condition that the state government will relocate the mines outside the national park in the alternate areas within the period of this temporary permission.

It is requested that during the period of temporary permission, the concerned officials may be directed to keep a strict vigil so that no fresh forest area is broken up during this period. It will be pertinent to mention here that regional office, Bhopal vide letter addressed to Chief Conservator of Forests (Land Management and F.C.), government of Madhya Pradesh has pointed out that mining activities were being continued in some fresh forest areas which were not broken up earlier. This should not have been allowed to re-occur.

It is also clarified that no further extension of temporary working permission from the state government will be entertained in future.'

Under no law in this country could the above clearance be given. It was obvious that there was a strong connection between the leasees of the mines and powerful politicians. And believe it or not, the 'special permissions' continued. This is indicated by a letter dated 14 May 1996, 'As a very special case this Ministry has decided to grant permission up to 30th June 1996....' Only in 1997 did the mining stop after the area was totally devastated. How could the central government issue such orders and under which law?

**T**o my objection, the inspector general forests in the ministry replied:

'The decision to grant temporary working permission up to June, 1996 in respect of 7 mines located in proposed extension area of Madhav National Park has been taken after careful examination of all the issues including hardships to local labourers engaged in the mines. It will be pertinent to mention that this permission is only for removal of existing material and completion of mining operations over already broken up forest area and more importantly, subject to the condition of relocation of these mines outside the national park within this period, so that the interest of the wildlife and labourers employed in these quarries can be safeguarded simultaneously.'

I could not believe it and in a letter to the IG Forests it was clarified that the area was reserved forest, national park land and it was illegal for the ministry to allow mining or removal of materials irrespective of the feelings of the labourers. Also, if the feelings of the labourers working in illegal mines were so important to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, they should have found alternative employment schemes for them. I never got another reply.

Similar examples of mining have taken their toll on Madhya Pradesh's forests. There are endless violations of a serious nature in Panna Tiger Reserve, the entire Bastar belt and in pockets across the length and breadth of the state. The Forest Conservation Act and the Wildlife Protection Act are totally abused. I even discovered the case of a missing sanctuary in the list of Madhya Pradesh's protected areas: Panna Sanctuary at the edge of Panna Tiger Reserve where endless mining encroachments have occurred. For some reason it was left out of the list and only recently has it reappeared. Such is the priority given to a sanctuary by the state government.

**I**n other cases, land from protected areas was being palmed off for irrigation projects which were totally in violation of the law. 40 hectares of land were given from Pachmarhi Sanctuary and a similar amount from Noradehi Sanctuary. I asked under which law was land from protected areas being given to irrigation projects. I knew that under the Wildlife Protection Act the only way this was possible was by denotification through a majority vote in the state legislative assembly. The reply:

'As regards the Amadehi Tank Project in Pachmarhi forests, the Chief Wildlife Warden, Madhya Pradesh has given a categorical certificate that the proposed transfer of land would not affect the wildlife of Pachmarhi Sanctuary and accordingly the proposal was approved vide this Ministry's letter dated 17.7.92.'

Now the letter dated 13.8.96 of CWLW, M.P. objecting the release of land 4 years after the land has already been released, was sent to the Government of M.P. for their comments. You are also apprised of the situation in the matter earlier.

The CWLW has certified that the area proposed does not form habitat of any migrating fauna or breeding ground and has recommended the proposal. Area approved in the case is 30.76 ha forest land which as per the CWLW, M.P. falls outside the boundary of Neradehi Wildlife Sanctuary.

**H**ow many cases exist where land from protected areas is handed away without any legal basis? It is a nightmare of violations that pile up in the files while our forests vanish each year. Political will to protect wildlife was absent, and when the central government did not accept the 'proposed diversion' the M.P. legislative assembly denotified the area. 160 hectares of Ghatigaon Great India Bustard Sanctuary were denotified by the legislative assembly for a railway line in 1993. Today this area has few signs of any wildlife. So much for the tiger state.

Madhya Pradesh leads in the race between the states for destroying their own natural heritage. This state earns a revenue off \$160 million from its forests, be it through commercial timber operations or from exploitation of minor forest produce. However, not even a minuscule half a million dollars goes back into the protection of the natural treasury. This is why the forest vanishes. Let us look at some official statistics to see what happened in the 1990s to the forests of Madhya Pradesh, which are its chest of natural treasures.

It is clear from a Planning Commission report that out of the 135,000 sq kms of forest cover, 72,000 sq kms was degraded – a result of the lack of funds spent on protection. This was the highest level of degradation for any state in India. The Forest Survey of India's 1993-1995 report revealed a loss of dense forest cover to the tune of 12,500 sq kms in Madhya Pradesh

and this was 70% of the total loss in India! The same report revealed a shocking total loss of 4,000 sq kms of forest in the tiger state, the highest loss of forest for any state in India.

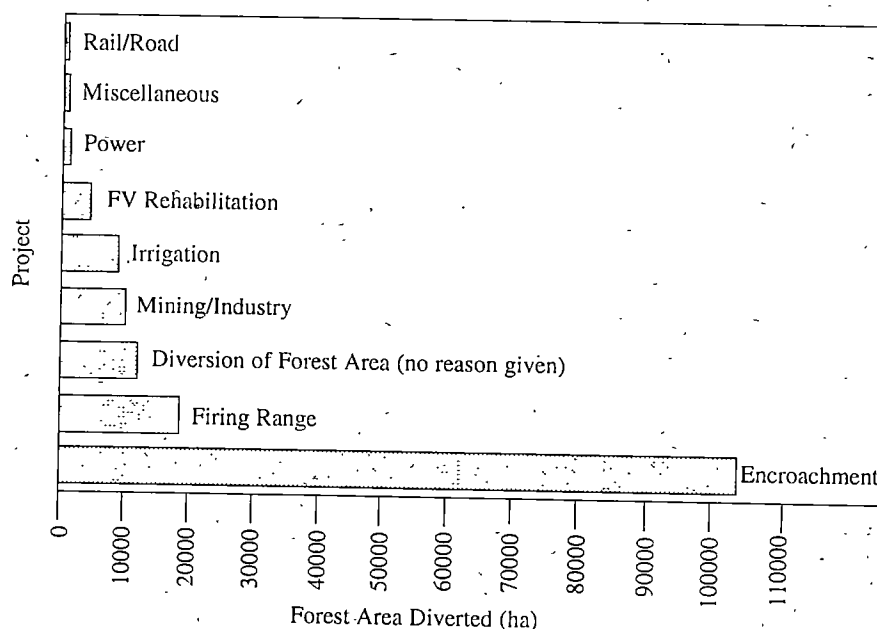
It is quite amazing how till the 1990s there was little decline in the forest cover and then everything started to go wrong. Till 1989, the Forest Survey of India revealed an increase of forest cover for Madhya Pradesh but in the 1990s started the first decrease of 389 sq kms in 1991, 232 sq kms in 1993 and then of course the shocking figures of 1995. In 1995, the forest area under illegal encroachment was 2,200 sq kms, the highest in India. In the 1990s a total of 1,600 sq kms of prime forest land was diverted. It was clear that the natural treasury of Central India was being plundered. What is the value of these forests? One small component of Madhya Pradesh's treasury is its growing timber stock that is 'marketable'. It is estimated at 700 million cubic metres. The value of each cubic metre is Rs 8000-10,000. The value of Madhya Pradesh's losses are mind boggling.

There are many ways to lose forest cover legally, but probably the

most ingenious one was exemplified by the *sal* borer episode which ravaged the only viable tiger corridor link between Kanha National Park and eastern Madhya Pradesh. The *sal* borer is an insect that lives and breeds in the *sal* trees. Some *sal* trees die when there is a profusion of this insect. For over a century, reports of this insect and its life cycle revealed that weather cycles are responsible for its profusion and the negative impact on the *sal* tree is contained by changes in the weather. But the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, believing that it is the master of nature, declared an epidemic of *sal* borer in 1997. Meetings and conferences were held and the experts agreed that the only way to save the *sal* forests was to cut the infected trees so as to minimise the infection in the following years.

Thus began a massive operation involving tens of thousands of labourers and thousands of trucks in the most pristine tiger forests around Kanha National Park. Before anyone could object, 600,000 trees were cut down. I was asked to assess the situation from the wildlife point of view and when our sub-committee carried

**Diversion of Forest Area in Madhya Pradesh, 1980-1997**



out its field visit, we were shocked that scores of healthy sal trees had been cut down using the excuse of an insect. Depots of wood were brimming full and the largest economic exploitation of the sal forests was underway with an estimated 30 lakh trees ready for the axe. It would have been one of the biggest timber operations in independent India.

**F**ortunately, a quickly produced and a sharply critical report on this entire operation resulted in an intervening application in a Supreme Court case which ordered an end to the cutting of any live sal tree. We had lost 600,000 trees but hopefully saved some. It was amazing to see an entire system crawl into the life cycle of an insect, not to deal with the disease, but to work out the commercial exploitation of the forest. On the 50th anniversary of India's independence and on the 25th anniversary of Project Tiger, the tiger state was showing its true colours in what I consider as one of the most shocking episodes of tree felling.

If we journey across Madhya Pradesh and look at some of the premier national parks, the state of affairs is shocking. Kanha Tiger Reserve is the jewel in Project Tiger's crown. In the last few years, its tigers have lost 600,000 trees in their home and in those vital corridors that connect them to the east. The management problems of Pench Tiger Reserve are compounded because of the 305 people that fish there. Checking identities, making ID cards, controlling movement in the core area is a nightmare for park managers. As speed boats on the Maharashtra side enforce the ban on fishing, the Madhya Pradesh park officials watch helplessly as scores of fishing boats pile up their catch on their side of the reservoir.

The periphery of Panna Tiger Reserve are a miner's delight and

whether for emeralds or white sand stone, the pressures steadily mount as encroachment and violation increase. The area around Bāndhavgarh Tiger Reserve gets more degraded each year. Even here, power projects like the Sanjay Gandhi thermal power plant position themselves on the tiger's habitat, causing further fragmentation.

Madhya Pradesh has not been left untouched by armed political insurgency. In some vital tiger areas like Balaghat near Kanha and in large sections of Bastar, vast tracts of forest are out of control of the Forest Department. In the Indrawati Tiger Reserve in the Bastar region, forest staff rarely enters the tiger reserve and people are generally advised not to go to the area because of a breakdown of law and order. Poaching is rampant in this region. And it's not just the five tiger reserves where problems magnify, but also in critical sanctuary areas like Pachmarhi, Bori, Sitanadi, Achanakmar, Noradehi and so on, where agricultural encroachments eat at the edge of the area. Also, fancy plans to expand towns like Pachmarhi are drawn up, even though it is in

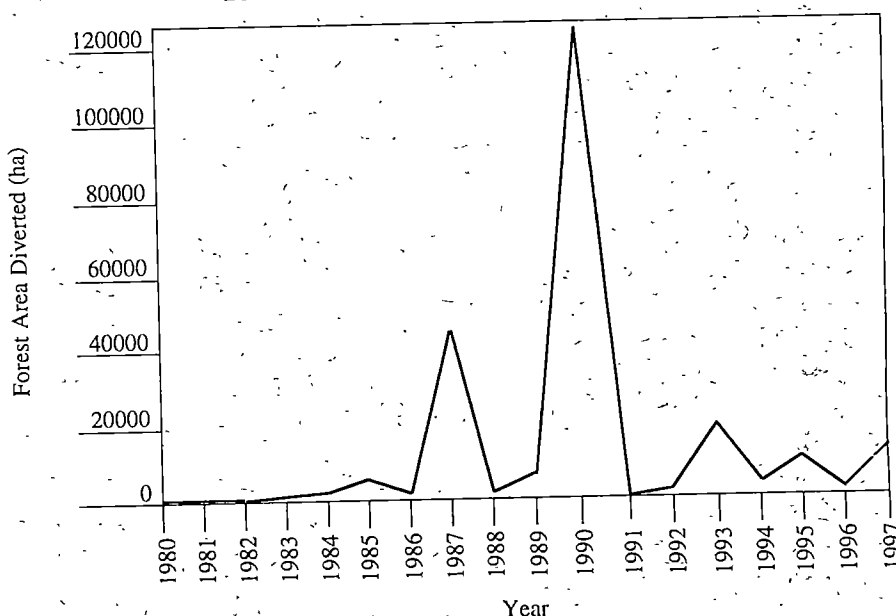
the heart of some of the finest tiger country.

You can still see wildlife and tigers in Madhya Pradesh. The question to ask is, 'For how long?'

There are a few men in the forest service who serve the natural treasury first, and they can be counted on one's fingers tips. Their courage is commendable, but at the end of it all they suffer punishment postings and isolation, their bosses write negatively about them in the confidential reports which affect their promotions. They soon lose hope and commitment. One such person worked closely with me in the preparation of a report, but after its submission the pressures mounted on him to such an extent that he was forced to write a note of disagreement. And this on a report he fully agreed with.

Another officer was relegated to oblivion because he fought for the rights of wildlife against the illegalities perpetuated by the system. Most men serve their bosses or political masters first and the tragedy is that the Indian Forest Service is losing its teeth as more and more forest land vanishes, on the whims of the

Diversion of Forest Area in Madhya Pradesh, 1980-1997



leadership of this country. Few fight back.

In Madhya Pradesh, senior forest officers often have huge egos. After all, forest revenues of over Rs 600 crore run the government. The World Bank's integrated forestry projects made symbolic allocations for wildlife, but even there the four jeeps that were meant for field officers in protected areas were retained by senior officers in the state capital. It is difficult to calculate the resultant damage to wildlife and when junior officers question such decisions, they are warned to keep silent. The forest service appears to have forgotten who it serves first. They keep busy massaging each other's egos and keeping up with the fashions of the times, forgetting that the treasures that must be protected are not in the state capital but in the field.

Let us not forget that the declaration of Pench Tiger Reserve did not make it a 'model', but set it on the path to destruction. Because Pench was a part of the minister's constituency, it enjoyed a favoured status – it was one of the seven areas chosen for eco-development in a World Bank sponsored scheme. But the Rs 30 crore it will get will do nothing – probably accelerate the process of destruction because few care one way or the other. The mechanisms to protect nature are totally crippled and for most no longer in fashion.

**M**adhya Pradesh received favoured status in the ministry while the minister was from the state – the giant share of the budget went to M.P. Suddenly, after the minister left, the chief wildlife warden complained to me that he was facing grave problems because of drastic reductions in the budget. I took the matter up with the boss of wildlife, the same man who had dealt with fishing. In his reply, he stated:

'So far as the Madhya Pradesh issue is concerned, it relates to central assistance under the National Parks and Sanctuary scheme and not to Project Tiger scheme. The fact is that although we had tentatively allocated a much higher amount for Madhya Pradesh, their proposals were found deficient in many details. By the time these were replied to by the chief wildlife warden, we had released the money to the other states, based on their demand and proposals. You will appreciate that funds are released on first-come-first-served basis, and we cannot indefinitely hold funds for some state which does not submit proper proposals and full details/clarifications in time. You have yourself also mentioned in many meetings that funds to be released in time where proposal are ready and OK.'

**W**hat was 'first-come-first-served basis?' Can you manage wildlife effectively if budgets rise and fall at the entry or exit of politicians? Since 1996, four ministers have come and gone. There are many examples of other states – the state of Rajasthan, the declared rhino state of Assam, the state of Bihar – all with a plate of problems that reads like a horror story. The World Bank integrated forestry projects are also rapidly replacing natural forests with exotic plantations, be it in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere.

The natural treasury of this country is vanishing. Its value is a million times more than our national treasury, be it gold, foreign exchange reserves or anything else. We don't allow our banks to be robbed, so why do we allow our bank of nature to be plundered? Lopsided priorities, greedy lobbies and a complete lack of commitment to our natural treasures has resulted in them being relegated to oblivion.

# Restricting human activity

M.D. MADHUSUDAN

WEST of Chikmagalur in Karnataka, the table-land of the Deccan Plateau rises to meet the wrinkled folds of the Western Ghats. Nestled in these lofty folds is the Kudremukha National Park. In the higher elevations of the park, grassy knolls crown the wind-beaten ridges. *Shola* forests with their gnarled and stunted trees huddle around gullies and streams as they hurry into the wet, thickly forested valleys below. These tracts are more than pretty landscapes – they are among the most important watersheds in the region with the rivers Bhadra, Tunga, Nethravathi, Suvarna, and Sitanadi all arising here. They also support rich wildlife assemblages comprising species such as the lion-tailed macaque, the great pied hornbill, large predators such as the tiger, leopard and dhole, and their prey. However, over the last three decades, numerous changes have occurred in this region, threatening its future prospects.

East of the main Kudremukha ridge, two decades of iron mining has badly scarred hundreds of hectares of

this landscape. Earlier, huge stretches of forests were logged to build roads, construct a reservoir, and to establish the Malleshwara mining township. The Forest Department also contributed to the ruin by covering vast stretches of grassland with plantations of exotic eucalyptus, casurina, and acacia. Such devastation continues to this day, with the recent issue of governmental clearances for further ore-prospecting in the region. The region's wildlife then, has suffered vastly under the onslaught of the state's unbridled commercial interests.

West of the main ridge is Dakshina Kannada district. Here, forces far less dramatic, but perhaps just as pervasive, preside over the devastation of wildlife. Last year, I walked over 200 kilometres through forests that were more-or-less bereft of wildlife. On these walks, I would hear my experienced local escorts recount tales of the region's once teeming wildlife. It was mostly their own energetic hunting, they confessed,



that had caused much of the wildlife declines. Today, many more people inhabit this region. Hence, they reasoned, the number of guns had risen, more land had been brought under the plough, more cattle grazed in the forests, with harvest of forest biomass on monumental scales. Thus, even as they barely eked out a living, the people here decimated wildlife.

The Kudremukha ridge then, as a metaphor, stands between two important forces—commerce and subsistence—that drive India's wildlife declines.

**H**istorically, the ascendancy of state-based commercial interests over local subsistence interests characterised the colonial policy of managing India's natural resources, principally its forests. Such a policy not only facilitated unrestrained commercial exploitation of areas under state control, but also necessarily intensified subsistence pressure on lands under local control.<sup>1</sup> Wildlife suffered in the resulting contest between state and local interests.

Post-independence, the Indian state placed a major emphasis on industrial development. A number of state-subsidised heavy industries, large irrigation and hydroelectric projects, road and railway expansions were initiated, often at great expense to wildlife habitats.<sup>2</sup> At this time, the country's population was in a tizzy, and food production assumed great importance. The grow more food campaign was launched. This encouraged extensive expansion of subsistence agriculture into forests and pastures. Loss of pasturelands aggravated livestock grazing pressures on forests. Under degrading range conditions then, there were outbreaks of livestock epidemics, which triggered die-offs in wild ungulates like the gaur and chital. Crop protection guns were

also sanctioned liberally under the campaign. Together with the availability of flashlights and jeeps, erosion of traditional restraints, and the rejection of hunting controls as a repressive colonial legacy, the wildlife of India was diligently being wiped out.<sup>3</sup>

With growing concern at these losses, an elite conservation movement coalesced within the country. It was able to mobilise political intervention for conservation at the highest levels of government. Under its preservationist impetus, the government designated several wildlife protected areas and passed the powerful Wildlife (Protection) Act to help stem wildlife declines. These efforts have indeed been successful in averting the otherwise imminent extinctions of species such as the tiger, Indian rhinoceros, and many others, and in checking the pace of decline among more widespread species.<sup>4</sup> The threats, however, remain and are being played out intensely as ever in our wildlife habitats.

**T**oday, the threats remain much the same as a hundred years ago. Well-organised developmental and commercial activity, and unorganised subsistence activity operate collaterally, often synergistically, in driving the decline of wildlife countrywide.

If developmental and commercial activities contribute prominently to wildlife declines via the usurpation and degradation of habitats, subsistence pressures often operate in less obvious fashions, but are equally competent in driving wildlife declines. Examples abound to illustrate this point. The India-Myanmar road being built through Arunachal Pradesh's Namdapha Tiger Reserve threatens to throw open this remote area to fresh human pressures.<sup>5</sup> Even as the road is being built, inveterate local hunting in the area pushes wildlife populations

down the tubes.<sup>6</sup> The Teirei Hydroelectric Project in Mizoram threatens to inundate large tracts of evergreen forests on the western fringe of Dampa Tiger Reserve.<sup>5</sup> However, subsistence *jhum* cultivation and hunting in the same area have already had disastrous consequences on this area's wildlife.<sup>7</sup> In Andhra's last tiger habitats—Nagarjunasagar, Nallamalai—heavy extraction of bamboo for paper mills poses the commercial threat,<sup>5</sup> while grazing by tens of thousands of cattle illustrates the scale of the subsistence threat. In Bharatpur, tourism is assuming industrial proportions and threatens the wetland wildlife just as do the pesticides leaching into the Ajan Bund from subsistence agricultural fields outside.<sup>5</sup>

**S**uch clear distinctions of commerce and subsistence are not always possible. Today, close linkages have emerged between many subsistence and commercial activities, blurring the contrast. Distant commercial interests commission and drive many, apparently subsistence, activities. In Masinagudi village of Tamil Nadu, thousands of cattle return every evening from the nearby Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary where they go in to graze. Dung collected overnight from their stalls is sent off in lorry-loads to fertilise gardens in faraway Coimbatore and Bangalore.<sup>8</sup> Around parts of Nagarahole, even the small local markets for wild meat tend to aggravate local hunting pressures on wildlife.<sup>4</sup> In the Great Himalayan National Park, local people collecting aromatic and medicinal plants for market contractors pit the alpine pastures of Gumtadav with their extensive digging.<sup>8</sup> In nearby Kiibber Wildlife Sanctuary, over the last decade, subsistence agro-pastoralist communities have increased their stocking rates of the yak three-fold in response to

demands from nearby markets.<sup>9</sup> Thus, nearly all local communities today act out threats authored by the relentless forces of global (and regional) markets over which they have no control.

These disconcerting accounts come from areas wherein wildlife enjoys express protection under law. Such protected areas, however, constitute only a niggling fraction of the nation's entire wildlife habitat. Outside these areas, protection to wildlife is virtually non-existent and the assault on them proceeds on a heroic scale.

**G**iven these facts, how can wildlife be conserved in India? At first appearance, simply eliminating all pressures from subsistence and commerce on wildlife should suffice. But, is this at all realistic? To answer this question is to juxtapose the ecological consequences of subsistence and commerce with their societal roles. Take any wildlife habitat. To the local user, its subsistence potential reigns paramount. Similarly, to the entrepreneur, its developmental potential, and to the conservationist, its intrinsic ecological potential. All are important, and none can be trifled with. However, here I proceed under the premise that our goal is to conserve wildlife. The question then is: in conserving wildlife, is it possible to also satisfy the goals of subsistence and commerce?

At this point, I believe that the term 'wildlife' needs a more rigorous definition – one that specifically includes species that are extremely sensitive and vulnerable to human pressures. First among them are large-bodied species of birds and mammals.<sup>10</sup> Their life-history traits such as occurrence at intrinsically low densities, large area requirements, slow rates of reproduction, and small litter sizes render them highly vulnerable to

all forms of human pressure. Many among these large-bodied species, such as large carnivores and elephants, invariably come into serious conflict – and lose – wherever their distribution overlaps human habitation.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, beyond the oft-cited example of the Bishnois of Rajasthan, there are virtually no examples of the peaceful coexistence of large, potentially dangerous wildlife with high-density human populations.

Next, there are specialists like the rhinoceros, lion-tailed macaque and the great pied hornbill, which are exclusively dependent on a narrow range of habitats and/or on select resources found within them.<sup>10</sup> They invariably flounder under regimes of intense human use. Indeed, a comparison of their abundances in areas facing human use, and those that do not, are apt to show major differences. Finally, there are endemics – species with highly restricted geographical distributions such as the Nilgiri tahr and grizzled giant squirrel.<sup>10</sup> Often, their restricted distributions are a consequence of their specialised needs, and losses in any one of their ranges means a compromise on the survival of an entire species. All wildlife, thus, are not equal.

**U**nder such a stricter definition of wildlife, the interests of conservation and the interests of subsistence and commerce clearly begin to diverge. In a context of high human density and fragile wildlife species, to realise either the subsistence or the commercial potential of wildlife habitats fully, necessarily implies forfeiting the goal of their conservation. This is not to suggest that, as a rule, wildlife is impossible to conserve where human subsistence goals are allowed to be met. Wildlife conservation is indeed possible in such regimes under two caveats – one, that population densi-

ties of local communities are exceedingly low and use is low intensity, and two, that we employ a definition of wildlife that is more pliant by including common, widespread and ecologically robust species. However, if we are indeed serious about conserving our fragile wildlife species, we must concede that it is near-impossible within landscapes catering to subsistence or developmental needs of our high-density human populations. These species need inviolate areas.

**U**nder a preservationist thrust, India's conservation programme has clearly recognised the need for inviolate areas. Through the last three decades, a network of wildlife reserves has been established wherein regimented forest departments employ legally sanctioned force to restrict or prohibit extractive human use. While these reserves have largely been successful in averting extinctions and stemming wildlife declines, they now face a wave of bitter conflict with local users. Today, these conflicts severely undermine India's effort to conserve its fragile wildlife.<sup>12</sup>

From their very inception, most wildlife reserves in India have contained resident human communities that have traditionally extracted resources from within. In order to render these areas inviolate, the state either coerced them to move out, or commonly used force to curb access to resources within the reserves. These measures, although very effective in the short term, amounted to mere subjection rather than a durable solution. At the same time, the local communities were expected to bear the costs of losses to crops, livestock, or life in conflicts with wildlife.<sup>12</sup> Genuine human concern for these communities was scant. In time, local anger and frustration generated by these measures have found voice in appropriate

political movements that now threaten conservation.

Given, on the one hand, the rigid conservation needs of certain wildlife, and on the other, a bitter experience with enforcing inviolate areas, what is the direction conservation in India needs to take? To ask that an area be maintained inviolate is not to reject human subsistence needs. It is true that under historical design and neglect, and in today's reigning pre-occupation with commerce, most subsistence lifestyles have suffered. Even to consider that underfed, ill-housed, illiterate peoples – often by the sheer force of numbers and need – visit much damage upon the vestiges of our wildlife habitats, generates a deep crisis of conscience. But, I believe, the answer is not to turn the clock back, and attempt a cleansing of history under naive notions that subsistence activity is no threat to wildlife, or recognise it – if at all – as completely remissible.

**T**o me, it does not appear that we are past all possibilities to maintain more areas as inviolate. A poor implementation of inviolate areas earlier does not attest that they are forever unworkable. Relocations of human communities are bound to be both painful and unsuccessful if they are executed – as they were earlier – merely as schemes to purge wildlife habitats of people. However, in many places today, local communities themselves desire access to basic amenities like housing, health-care and education, and are prepared to move to the peripheries of wildlife reserves to obtain them. It is absurd to reject such opportunities.

With such communities, well-planned participatory relocations are feasible provided these efforts demonstrate genuine congruence with the goals of social development of these communities, once they move out. Prompt and fair compensation must

be made for animal depredations. Only when there is a firm link between the concern for wildlife and the neutralisation of the opportunity costs to local communities will inviolate areas become an enduring reality. Where opportunities exist, serious consideration must be paid to local sharing of the non-use benefits (revenue from low-intensity tourism currently seems the only one) of keeping areas inviolate.

This does not detract from the fact that it remains absolutely essential that social disincentives must accompany all economic incentives to keep wildlife habitats inviolate. To administer these social disincentives (penalties, imprisonment, and so on), a regulatory authority at some level of government is essential – if state administered coercion is unacceptable, coercion administered locally is fine too. Finally, double standards must go. Inviolates must be out-of-bounds for commercial exploitation as much as they will be for subsistence uses. Conceived thus, inviolate areas for wildlife will, of necessity, form components of a larger landscape matrix dedicated to meeting human needs – subsistence use as well as commercial production.

**A**longside these efforts to forge long term alliances with local communities and generate greater local support for conservation, we need to address the realities of the hour. Our inescapable responsibility right now is to ensure that the wildlife there survives long enough to be conserved under strategies that are humane, just and democratic. And that means the continuation of preservationist measures to prevent poaching and the heedless biomass pressures on wildlife habitats. These must not be regarded as intrigues against human communities, but as reflections of the

enormous constraints we must work under in conserving fragile wildlife.

**O**ne does wish that there were easier ways of conserving wildlife in the human-dominated Indian landscape. But, there aren't. If we are serious about it though, it is time we got real and made some tough decisions.

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# Nature at stake

AMITA BAVISKAR

FOR an environmental sociologist, the conflict over wildlife conservation is a particularly absorbing subject of study. While most other conflicts over nature are fairly easy to fit into a standard sociological matrix of class, caste, gender and nation, wildlife conservation presents a peculiarly intractable problem. If one were to study conflict around a river, for instance, the multiple users of the resource could be categorised in class terms for a perfectly adequate explanation of the political economy of water. In the case of wildlife conservation however, though the framework of class analysis tells us a great deal about the interests and ideologies at work in the confrontation, class is not enough. It is not enough to accept, as we do for forests, that the state represents the interests of industry and affluent consumers and that poor villagers who use

the resource for subsistence are its best stewards. The assumption, which is an article of faith for many of us, that ecology and equity go hand in hand, stands shaken when applied to wildlife conservation.

Wildlife conservation poses a challenge for the discipline of environmental sociology which is both analytical and political. To speak of the aesthetic values of nature or of the rights of other species to survive may well be bourgeois sentimentality. To stress the importance of preserving biodiversity for future generations on the planet may be scientific conceit. Yet, the case for conservation is not easily dismissed. There does seem to be an elusive, yet perceptible, value to nature that leaps across the cleavages of class.

To speak of such a value lays one open to the charge of being as bourgeois a sociologist as the binocular-

toting wildlifer. This is a risk we run when we acknowledge that conservation is not simply a conspiracy to swindle the poor forest-dweller of resources. Or when we accept that the practices of the poor today are not necessarily the most ecologically sustainable in all cases. Or when we admit that, however iniquitous, state policing has in some instances preserved pockets of wilderness that would otherwise have been swallowed up by the ever-encroaching tide of what scientists tactfully call 'biotic pressures'.

But the problems are immense. While a consensus around conservation is both desirable and possible, this happy outcome is certainly not in sight today. India's protected areas – national parks and wildlife sanctuaries – are the creation of a state which rides roughshod over the priorities of the people who live in and around these areas. What to conserve and how is decided by committees of experts – bureaucrats and scientists – who are not accountable to the ordinary people whose lives they so decisively affect. Access to these committees is privileged and small wonder that it is the affluent urban nature-lovers of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) or the Bombay Natural History Society who have the ear of an Indira Gandhi.

**T**o attempt to conserve by unilateral fiat is to beg for trouble. Villagers in the vicinity of protected areas suddenly find that their rights to forest produce are stopped or severely curtailed and they have nowhere else to go. Since their loss is rarely compensated, they continue to use the forest, only to be branded as criminals for violating the Wildlife Protection Act. To suffer the ignominy of being booked for a forest offence, humiliation at the hands of a forest guard, the confiscation of forest produce, livestock or implements, is a daily burden

that forest-dwellers bear. Conservation finds no support around the protected area. On the other hand, instances of arson and theft are frequent reminders of the resentment that villagers feel. Nor are local people likely to protest when the protected area is degraded by the timber mafia or mining companies or poachers. In fact, these activities usually happen with local complicity.

**I**n such a fraught relationship, ecodevelopment pops up as a panacea. The strategy is simple: invest in creating alternative sources of livelihood around the protected area so that people stop going into the forest. Give people an incentive which weans them away from their customary practices and they will surrender their rights without a murmur. No longer will the settlement of rights be such an obstacle in the process of notifying a park or sanctuary. Ecodevelopment appears to be a win-win solution.

One of the main votaries of ecodevelopment in India is the World Bank. Having burnt its fingers with projects requiring the forced displacement of large populations, the Bank seeks to experiment with softer options, in this case that of the 'voluntary resettlement' of rights. The first phase of ecodevelopment in India was funded by an IDA loan from the Bank. Two national parks – Great Himalayan National Park in Himachal Pradesh and Kalakkad Mundanthurai in the southern Nilgiris were the first to be chosen for ecodevelopment. Subsequently, the Bank funded ecodevelopment in seven other parks and sanctuaries including Ranthambhor in Rajasthan, Gir in Gujarat, Rajaji in U.P. and Melghat in Maharashtra through the Global Environment Facility. In many ways, the case of the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) highlights the hazards that ecodevelopment fails to navigate.

The Great Himalayan National Park covers an area of 765 sq km in Kulu district, Himachal Pradesh. Most of the park consists of snow-clad mountain ridges more than 5500 m tall, divided by the gorges cleft by streams that ultimately join the Beas river, and the separate watershed of the Parbati valley. The streams flow through moist temperate forests of oak and conifers which, in the upper reaches, make way for high-altitude forests of birch and fir interspersed with sub-alpine pastures, which in turn yield to alpine meadows, scrub and snow-capped peaks. The vegetational diversity of the park sustains an equally rich fauna, including several endangered species such as musk deer, brown bear, Himalayan tahr, blue sheep, serow, western tragopan, and the chir and monal pheasants.

**E**very spring, as the snow starts to melt in the mountains, the high altitude pastures come out of hibernation. When the weather warms, thawing ice moistens the soil and allows the first shallow-rooted herbs to sprout. As spring lapses into summer, the pastures change colour as one group of herbs, grasses and sedges flowers, sets seed and dies, to be replaced by another group. The wild herbivores of the area are not the only beings to keenly monitor this succession; for the human inhabitants of the adjoining villages, the seasonal vegetation includes as many as fifty species of medicinal use which have become commercially important in recent years. The pastures in the park provide the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries with herbs such as *dhoop* (*Jurinea macrocephala*), *kadu* (*Picrorhiza kurroa*), *patees* (*Aconitum heterophyllum*), *hathpanja* (*Orchis latifolia*) and *nhaini* (*Valeriana hardwickii*). From the shaded understorey of the forest, villagers also col-

lect morel mushrooms (*Morchella esculenta*) which are ultimately exported to Europe.

The pastures provide excellent forage for around 23,000 sheep and goats. In an intricately ordered system of grazing runs, villages around the park, and several of those further afield in Ani *tehsil*, despatch their livestock in herds of 500 to a 1000, supervised by three or four shepherds and their dogs, into the park. From May to October, the animals graze in the alpine pastures and gain the flesh that will see them through the winter.

**W**hile grazing is an ancient activity with a recorded history of over a century and a half, the park itself is of recent creation. From 1980 onwards, the birds and large mammals in the reserved forests of the region were sporadically surveyed by Gaston and Garson (a Canadian and British biologist, respectively), key actors in the Himachal Wildlife Project, an enterprise of international environmental NGOs and the Himachal government. Largely on their recommendation, the initial notification for the GHNP was issued in 1984 and a ten-year management plan was prepared in 1987. Local people figured in the plan only as degraders of prime wildlife habitats who would have to be provided alternative employment in return for making them give up their traditional resource use. The plan does not appear to have consulted villagers, except through informal conversations with the porters accompanying the biologists and with shepherds met along the way.

Since the initial notification, there has been a long gap in the implementation of the management plan. So far, the only significant achievement of the park authorities has been to check the customary practices of hunting and trapping. However, getting people to stop collecting medi-

cinal plants and grazing livestock, as required for any national park by the Wildlife Protection Act, has been impossible. Villagers' rights are recorded in minute detail in the Forest Settlement Report of 1886 which has never been revised. Villagers' confidence about their rights to resources inside the park is in large measure derived from this document.

The report is part of folklore; illiterate village elders, who could never have had access to the volume, let alone read it, when questioned about their rights will say that on such and such a page of the book the names of their ancestors are recorded and that is how they, the descendants, come to have rights. Of course, the rights accorded in 1886 now operate in a vastly changed context where human and livestock populations, land use practices, lifestyles and links with the outside economy bear little resemblance to what prevailed more than a century ago.

**Y**et curtailing villagers' access to the park, as the law demands, is a nettle that the park authorities have been reluctant to grasp. Himachali villagers think nothing of calling up their MLA who then calls up the park director to tick him off for harassing his people. Confident of their rights and their political support, villagers around the park casually flout the law. While the problem of the settlement of rights bedevils every protected area, it is unusual to find a case such as the GHNP where the Forest Department is on the defensive.

And so ecodevelopment. Get the people out of the park by laying a trail of carrots. And ecodevelopment has carrots galore for everyone. The Forest Department got Rs 7 crore from the Bank to be disbursed between 1994-1999, repayable at four per cent interest. Besides village-level

investment, the funds were to be spent on improving park management (training, equipment, infrastructure) and research (being conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India). Rumours of vast sums of money had started floating around the GHNP even before the project started. Accompanied as they were by darker rumours that their rights would be abrogated, villagers opposed ecodevelopment from the onset. One of the conditions stipulated by the Bank, that the park authorities get enforceable undertakings from villagers that they would forego their rights to resources inside the park in return for ecodevelopment, proved impossible to meet. Ecodevelopment was off to a rocky start.

Much of the controversy about ecodevelopment in the GHNP could have been avoided by identifying the problem more clearly. The Forest Department began by assuming that human resource use inside the park is the main problem besetting wildlife conservation. The scientific basis of this far-reaching assumption was rather sketchy since there was no baseline survey of biodiversity in the park, let alone any long term monitoring of ecological changes. Without exact evidence about which specific practices adversely affected wildlife, the park authorities launched off on ecodevelopment.

**R**ecent research by the Wildlife Institute of India points towards a complex situation. As far as the pressure of livestock is concerned, grazing is an activity of ancient vintage which seems, over time, to have been accommodated and even integrated into ecological processes in the park. The extent of grazing has not increased over the years either. Studies from other regions in the Himalaya show that a forest clearing created by grazing may actually increase flo-

ral diversity. And the manure left behind by visiting herds is a valuable fertilizer for the pastures.

Villagers around the GHNP also point out that their practices are carefully co-ordinated to spread the pressure of grazing evenly across different pastures. The grazing runs are timed in such a manner that the movement from pasture to pasture coincides with optimal fodder availability. In each pasture, villagers take care to bed their animals down for the night in certain spots such that 'weeds' like rumex do not proliferate. So grazing does not seem to be a major threat to the wildlife in the park.

**T**he threat to biodiversity by plant collectors is more substantial. In 1997, most of the major medicinal plants collected in the north-west Himalaya were included by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) in its Red Data Book. Several of the species collected from the GHNP figure on this list as critically endangered and threatened. While protecting these plants is important, banning extraction (as must happen under the Wildlife Protection Act) is an extreme solution.

The harvesting of medicinal plants should be regulated by the collectors themselves by devising rules about rotation of collection sites and enforcing a calendar which ensures that the plants can set seed before they are collected. Local panchayats which charge a royalty on medicinal plants could well be the best agencies for managing such a system with the backing of the Forest Department. Given the complexity of human impacts on the park, and the importance of these activities for local subsistence, there needs to be a carefully considered evaluation of resource use practices. Instead, park authorities tend to make unwarranted assumptions leading to a blanket ban.

An ecodevelopment project which begins by assuming that villagers are the problem is both scientifically dubious and socially unjust. The only response that it evokes from villagers is overt and covert resistance. That such an ill-fated beginning should be made at all is due to the structure of domination within which the World Bank and the Forest Department operate, in which villagers have no place in defining the problem or its solutions. Forever damned as criminals by the Wildlife Protection Act, the ideology of ecodevelopment offers salvation, but on terms set by the park authorities.

Villagers feature in ecodevelopment only as objects of social engineering, their practices to be remade in the image desired by the Bank and the Forest Department. Local protest should nudge these institutions towards negotiating solutions with the involvement of all the parties. Yet the straitjacket of law and the blinkers of power confine the possibilities for creative, participatory management of resources. Since local resistance is fairly strong in the area around the GHNP, the project is completely sidelined and a free-for-all reigns. This, of course, reinforces the Forest Department's belief that people degrade resources in the park.

**I**f ecodevelopment were to be made more participatory, would it be the best strategy for managing India's protected areas? Perhaps, but the experience of the GHNP suggests otherwise. Ecodevelopment targets the practices of the community living on the periphery of the park for transformation. Its avowed aim is to make local practices 'ecologically sustainable'. Meanwhile, every other trend in the area, each state intervention for rural development, is moving in the

opposite direction towards greater resource extraction.

Local farmers have shifted to synthetic fertiliser and pesticide intensive horticulture. Most young people seek the urban middle class lifestyles that government jobs promise. The first demand voiced by all villagers is for roads which will, among other things, allow their produce to fetch higher prices in distant urban markets. Increased links with the rest of the world have changed what was once a largely self-sufficient economy based on animal husbandry and subsistence farming. The rural community has become more differentiated. And the horizons of the upwardly mobile are no longer set by the high peaks of the GHNP but by the high-rises of *Dilli*.

**S**ince ecodevelopment resolutely ignores these changes, it cannot address the broader issue of sustainability within which 'local' practices are situated. The GHNP attracts 'ecological refugees'—impoverished Nepali migrant labourers who are hired by local traders to collect herbs. These migrants (who, despite their vulnerability, are left out of all the ecodevelopment plans because they are not 'local' and do not have rights) and the local villagers are today dependent on medicinal plant collection, for subsistence in some cases or for profit in others. A ban for the sake of 'ecological sustainability' will deny both these groups of income, even as the pharmaceutical industry sources its supply from elsewhere, where there is no ban.

As long as the question of sustainability is defined in a piecemeal way, localized to problematize the practices of only one set of villagers, ecodevelopment will not work. What incentive or precept do villagers have for prudence when they see profligacy

all around? The World Bank, a veteran of ecologically disastrous projects, certainly does not practice what it preaches. Nor do most votaries of conservation try for sustainability in their immediate environment. As the boundaries between Gadgil and Guha's notion of 'omnivores' and 'ecosystem people' begin to blur, the Bank and the state try to freeze one half of the frame. While for the rest of the world it is business as usual, those whose lives are most immediately connected with the park are expected to stick to an externally-set standard of sustainability. Is this realistic? Is it just?

Ecodevelopment may succeed as a stop-gap measure if it is able to offer people sufficient inducement on terms which are negotiated between all the stakeholders. But this truce will prevail only up to the point that alternative, more sustainable and remunerative, livelihoods are created and maintained. With aspirations spiralling ever upwards, eco-development will have to run faster and faster to stay in the same place. On the other hand, conservation in key centres of biodiversity stands a better chance of success if it is part of a consensus about natural resource use nationally.

Such a consensus will not foist conservation onto some villagers while enabling others to enjoy resource-intensive lifestyles. Such a consensus will spread the burden of resource use more evenly among different groups. Such a consensus cannot be mobilized by the Forest Department in its present form, but will be the outcome of a much more democratic polity. If the cause of conservation transcends social differences, it must find support in both civil society and the state. Creating this support is not a task that the World Bank can fulfil. What is needed is a collective endeavour by those most immediately dependent on nature and those who support their cause.



# Books

**FENCING THE FOREST: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860-1914** by Mahesh Rangarajan. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

THE book under review constitutes an important contribution to a growing body of scholarship on the environmental history of South Asia. Through a detailed study of the erstwhile Central Provinces, the author explores the evolution of colonial forest and wildlife policies and practices, and the ecological and social changes wrought by them. The introduction contains a review of the existing literature and the major debates on the environmental history of the subcontinent, and presents the conceptual framework that guides the study. This framework successfully strikes a middle path between pre-colonial romantics and colonial apologists by pointing out that it is possible to acknowledge pre-colonial human-nature disequilibrium and yet demonstrate the qualitatively greater disruption caused by colonial policies. Rangarajan

adds another dimension to the discourse by hypothesizing that while material interests (in natural resources or revenues or in maintaining strategic control) clearly drove much of colonial policy, some of the more extreme measures and approaches adopted by the British (and some of the responses of Indian communities) can only be explained by understanding the cultural background and ethos of the rulers (and the ruled).

The first chapter is an overall review of state forest policy till the passing of the 1878 Forest Act. Rangarajan successfully substantiates the point about a qualitative difference between pre-colonial and colonial policies. Although 'there was no functional harmony [in pre-colonial times], fresh arable land was abundant, and state intrusion [into day-to-day resource use] was limited' (p.16). Indian rulers were 'content to take a share of the surplus. They did not attempt to outlaw or suppress any specific form of land use.' Thus, hunters, grazers, shifting cultivators, and peasants all co-existed.

The British, on the other hand, came with their own history that conditioned their attitudes – their experience with Irish rebels who took shelter in forests, their understanding of forests as the abode of lawless squatters and robbers, and their perception of forests as lands ‘that had lapsed into a state of nature because of inadequate care by man’ (p. 17). Thus, their initial antagonism towards uncultivated lands and mobile groups cannot be entirely explained in terms of their obvious material and strategic interests in controlling and exploiting forests. What one sees is the co-evolution of policy under the material demands for timber and the ideological bias against the jungle and the jungle-dwellers, culminating in the creation of the Imperial Forest Department and the highly intrusive Forest Act of 1878.

The next three chapters describe in great detail how this intrusive policy evolved and adapted to the specific ecological and social conditions prevailing in the erstwhile Central Provinces region (straddling today’s Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa) and what the social response and ecological consequences were, with each chapter exploring a specific issue: silviculture (ch.2), shifting cultivation (ch.3) and *shikaar*/wildlife management (ch.4). In the context of silviculture, Rangarajan points out that the conflict between the state and the local populace cannot really be cast in terms of ‘monoculture versus mixed forests’ or ‘cash crops versus subsistence species’, but rather as a direct conflict over access to forest lands and products. The chapter on shifting cultivation provides a detailed account of the British obsession with suppressing shifting cultivation – an obsession that went beyond concern with its impact on timber availability, possibly driven by the White Man’s burden of reforming the ‘savages’.

The description of the impact of British policies towards hunting and wildlife was for me the most fascinating part of the book, exploring as it does ‘a crucial but neglected sub-plot’ of the colonial drama. Rangarajan convincingly shows how British policies in this instance were driven primarily by non-material concerns, by notions of vermin, of sport, and of status, in ways that were generally at odds with the interests (and also more monolithic than the approaches of) the local communities. Britishers protected deer for sport, while cultivators looked upon deer as a menace to crops but also as a source of food. The single-minded extermination of carnivores (wolves, wild dogs, tigers) during this period reflects the prejudices of the British, not the concerns of the locals who, in fact, saw better the

ecologically balancing role played by the carnivores. The consequent decimation of the carnivore population on the one hand and the labelling of all forms of traditional hunting as ‘poaching’, ‘cruel’, and ‘wasteful’ is one of the bitter legacies of British rule that endures to this date.

The book is at times repetitious, lacks good maps and tables, and the writing style is not always smooth. The author’s dependence upon archival material limits the evidence and discussion on ecological change. Nevertheless, I would recommend it as required reading for all students of environmental history and also all those who still labour under the belief that the Imperial Forest Department was set up (as a good forester friend of mine put it!) to ‘protect people from their own improvidence’.

Sharachchandra Lele

**CROCODILE FEVER: Wildlife Adventures in  
New Guinea by Rom and Zai Whitaker: Orient  
Longman, Delhi, 1998.**

FOR well over a quarter century, herpetology in India has been associated in both the scientific and popular mind with the work of Rom Whitaker and his band of reptile addicts, mainly based in Chennai. The founding of the wildly popular Snake Park on the edge of the urban forest of Guindy was followed a few years later by the creation of a crocodile breeding and research centre off the road to Mahabalipuram.

Over the last two decades the Crocodile Bank, as it is called, has played a key role in helping rescue the three species of crocodilians from extinction in the sub-continent. Further, it has also set up the nucleus from which wild populations can be replenished. But the final act in the drama is on hold: the project to start a captive crocodile harvesting programme. India’s wildlife laws remain too rigid and officialdom too convinced that the only way to save nature is to try and lock all market forces out.

*Crocodile Fever* is the story of a similar venture, but it is one in which the harvesting and breeding of crocodiles did manage to accomplish its objective of controlled and regulated commercial harvesting. The story is set in Papua New Guinea, one of the most wildlife-rich islands on earth. It all began in 1978 when Rom Whitaker got a telegram from the Food and Agriculture Organization asking him to serve as an adviser and consultant for two years. Even after this sojourn, the Whitakers returned on shorter trips into the region to

survey and document the fate of crocodiles in the wild.

It is difficult for most of us brought up on tales about more charismatic animals like elephants and tigers to really like crocodiles. The great salt water crocodile, for instance, is both hunter and hunted. The book recounts how team members actually found irrefutable evidence, for the first time, of a 20-foot long 'saltie'. Across huge stretches of estuary and river, the salt water croc and its smaller fresh water cousin were vanishing as the skin trade provided incentives to catch and kill them. At the same time, there is little point in being unduly romantic when there is clear evidence that humans do get eaten by salt water crocodiles, though the stories about them are prone to be vastly exaggerated.

The Whitakers started with a simple premise: that the skins were by far the most valuable commodity that came out of the reptile's habitat. But the 'uncontrolled plundering of a resource' was doubly harmful as it wiped out populations in the span of a few years while exploiting the tribals as a source of cheap labour. Instead, they hoped to make captive rearing and breeding a viable industry. Drawing on their own experience of establishing saurians in captivity, they set about evolving basic guidelines for the task in Papua New Guinea.

But the census of crocodiles on the Sepik river turned out to be very different from the same kind of project undertaken in India. Here, they were dealing with a terrain that was very lightly peopled and with conditions that were much more forbidding. Eventually, they used a mix of techniques, counting crocodiles by flashlight at night when their eyes shine in the dark, and counting their nests by day, from a helicopter. The latter included brief landings to count the number of eggs, often a risky operation as mother crocodiles are capable of charging at intruders.

What makes the book a treat are the travelogues through areas and ecologies one rarely gets to learn much about. It is also heartening that Indian wildlife biologists are beginning to play a role in South East Asia. Nowhere has this such unpredictable consequences as when Whitaker and friends go 'snake-hunting', capturing live specimens to stage a snake show that was an instant hit. The highly poisonous two metre long taipan is described as 'nervous (and) frightened of humans'. The more colourfully named carpet python was trapped in the war dumps outside Port Moresby, where the huge populations of rodents sustained the snakes. The pictures in this book are not only an opener to the diversity of reptiles in Papua New

Guinea but also proof enough, if any was needed, that snakes can rival butterflies in their dazzling array of colours.

It was only in 1987 that Whitaker's team was allowed into Irian Jaya, a half a million square kilometre region populated by over 3,000 tribes. The account sensitively brings out the often tragic results of break-neck modernization in such areas. Japanese paper companies are logging the mangroves vital for the regeneration of fisheries. Laws are openly flouted. But the evidence points to how far-reaching the tentacles of the market can be: wiry Irianese hunters go out in boats hunting crocs with bow and arrow. One cannot but admire their courage, even as it is disturbing to learn how the skins they take end up in the world market.

The end notes tell us how crocodile farms are now flourishing in Papua New Guinea, and are run both by Chinese entrepreneurs and tribal cooperatives. One wishes the book told us more about how captive harvesting can be managed without becoming a conduit for illegal killing of crocs in the wild. It would also have been helpful had the authors appended a list of their scientific publications on the region's wildlife.

But the pictures are first rate, and the text makes for an easy read. Rom's passion for reptiles and Zai's literary flavour makes a fine combination. This book is a must and not only for reptile buffs. Wallabies and cuscuses, cassowaries and cockatoos, all add up to a heady mix. This is the zone where Asia and Australia meet, and this is a glimpse into that land of beyond.

**Mahesh Rangarajan**

**NATURE AND THE ORIENT: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia** edited by Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

A MAJOR shift in aesthetic valuation and preference has been underway over the past 100 years, more so especially since World War II. It is a shift of which we are all aware—the rise of environmental conservation, or 'green' consciousness. This consciousness has begun to exercise a substantial effect on world politics to the extent that in 1983 the World Bank was forced to include environmental cost assessment in all its projects. The early 1980s also saw the publication of the first reports by the Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi. The protracted and still unresolved controversies over the Narmada and Tehri dams have

brought environmental politics to the front pages of the Indian press.

The social sciences began to reflect this quickening interest, and historians were soon involved in the enterprise of environmental history. Archaeologists and ancient historians had, indeed, long been aware of these issues, and environmental degradation had been invoked to explain the decline of some civilizations. However, early environmental arguments were simply couched in terms of overpopulation and the reckless consumption of resources. The implicit message was that strong regulation by a scientifically informed state would solve such problems. The issue of the distribution of resources among different claimants was ignored.

Ramachandra Guha termed this 'environmentalism from above', characteristic particularly of colonial governments which thought of themselves as vastly superior to the peoples they ruled. Guha's *The Unquiet Woods* (OUP 1989) presented a pioneering critique of this approach and its assumptions. However, Guha tended to present colonial forestry as the instrument of capitalist effort to control and commercialize forest resources. A different perspective was offered by Richard Grove's *Green Imperialism* (OUP 1995). This book emphasized the intellectual roots of a sincere anxiety about environmental degradation on the part of at least some policy-makers in the British colonial world, and located it in a large body of empirical observation of the consequences of human interference in fragile environments. As Guha had noted, the question of how people treat their environment cannot be separated from how they perceive it; hence cultural anthropologists have also begun to address environmental concerns in their work. Meanwhile, Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha published *This Fissured Land* (OUP 1992), a bold survey of Indian environmental history from the earliest times to the present, incorporating much of Guha's research on colonial forestry, but also including Gadgil's bold hypothesis that the caste system evolved to meet the problem of scarcity of natural resources that was felt in the first millennium C.E.

The issues raised have excited a host of scholars, and the volume under review presents the work of no less than 31 of them. The period covered ranges from the global warming that ended the Ice Age about 10,000 years ago to the early 1990s. Given the enormous range of the areas and topics covered, this review is perhaps best organized by looking at a few themes of contemporary relevance.

*Pre-colonial impact of human activity:* Did 'traditional' societies—societies that existed before the

hegemony of industrial capitalism and colonialism—have no significant impact on the natural environment? The archaeologists would certainly disagree. Allchin points out that the Harappan cities made major demands on the local environment, and argues that the treelessness of the trans-Indus hills may be explained by the constant pressure of human and animal populations over thousands of years. Erdosy also finds evidence of human activity modifying local ecosystems, with periodic alteration of the forest cover and gradual denudation. However, 'irreversible ecological decline came only with the Industrial Revolution, even in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab.'

Nor were such impacts confined to our sub continent. An exciting study by Stargardt describes how the Satingpra civilization of the Malay peninsula fine-tuned its environment for rice-paddy and navigation, and Reid indicates two major periods of environmental change in South East Asia generally. The first of these began in the 8th century C.E., with the spread of terraced paddy cultivation; the second with the rapid spread of market-oriented agriculture from the 15th century, as sugar, cloves, coffee and so on occupied former forest land. At the same time, extensive international trade led to the depletion of woodland resources including sandalwood and wild elephants. The pattern of trade between hunter-gatherers of the forest upland and settled peasants of the valleys is sketched in Kathirithamby-Wells.

This is important because alongside the idea that 'traditional' societies had no impact on their environment is the myth that natural products did not enter long-distance trade. These notions are contradicted not only by Reid but also by Boomgardt for 17th century Indonesia and Tucker in his work on the western Himalayas at the outset of British rule. Of course, trade expanded in a major way with the Industrial Revolution. Early railways in India imported pine from Norway and ironwood from Australia, while drawing on regional resources for sleepers. Once built, they enabled far vaster movement of materials.

*Forestry, modern science and the state:* The colonial period in South Asia also saw the imposition of an unprecedented degree of state control over forest lands, and this generated a mass of official records on the issue. Not surprisingly, therefore, many papers explore aspects of this process, as well as the resistance to it in Madhya Pradesh, parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka as well as in princely states in the arid region of Rajasthan. This last is studied by Edward Haynes and his paper presents an integrated view

the management of cultivation, grazing, woodland and hunting preserves. The latter are, of course, of particular interest because several important national parks were originally such princely preserves.

The Forest Department's justification of its extensive powers was, and is, couched in terms of its superior scientific understanding, and this justification is assessed by several authors. Ravi Rajan argues that Indian scientific forestry was imported from Germany, and brought with it a contempt for local populations because of their ostensible scientific and technological backwardness. Subhash Chandran is strongly sceptical and believes that science was merely a cover for the hidden agenda of driving tribal people to work on the plantations; Patel denounces the modern neglect of the tribals' deep traditional knowledge of their environment. A larger point in this controversy is made by Grove, who suggests that western science often drew from infusions of indigenous knowledge and the work of colonial scientists, and so the separation of the two need not be overstressed.

Buchy, who studied the same region as Chandran, finds colonial forest policy not so much ecologically unsound as socially and economically disruptive. The role of political power in modifying scientific rigour is shown by Meyer's study of Sri Lanka where forest control was blocked by powerful planter interests, and so confined largely to persecuting Sinhala forest users. A paper by Greenough provides an interesting sidelight on scientific and factual discourse by skillfully unearthing rhetorical devices and tropes that structure those much consulted sources – Hunter's *Statistical Accounts of Bengal*.

*Communities, cultures, rights:* The colonial foresters saw population growth and the consequent demand for land as a prime cause of forest destruction. In this volume, Flint sees deforestation driven by agricultural expansion and aggravated by unsustainable extraction as 'a dominant trend in the history of Indian land-use.' Her paper cites data to show that in 1880 about 32 per cent of India's surface was under woodland of some sort, and an equal proportion under cultivation; by 1980 cultivation covered 44 per cent of area, and forest, including degraded woods, 20 per cent. This was not solely a result of demographic growth (the population trebled in that century); but also of over exploitation despite government controls designed to prevent it. However, she does note efforts at the sustainable management of *sal* forest in recent decades.

If state efforts are misguided and ineffective, as many contemporaries argue, how do local communi-

ties manage resources? The classic work on this is by Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (CUP, 1990), which emphasizes community conventions and policing. In this volume, Subhash Chandran presents the sacred groves of South Kanara as an example of such collective self-restraint. Similarly, Zerner provides a richly textured study of how both spirit guardians and human watchmen were deployed by Indonesian villagers in the Maluku islands to prevent theft and over-exploitation of various resources. The need to invoke such a complex of sanctions is itself an indication of the attractiveness of cheating. Sources of modern disruption of such community restraints figure in Kathirithamby-Wells, who points to the forces of immigration and consumerism. Thus, the low-powered controls possible in small, isolated local communities may not be successful where truckers with chainsaws and AK-47s can sweep off the growth of decades in a matter of hours.

It will thus be evident that this book bears on a whole range of issues highly relevant to contemporary debates on the environment, and demonstrates the value of taking a long perspective on these burning contemporary problems.

Sumit Guha

**ECOLOGY, CLIMATE AND EMPIRE: The Indian Legacy in Global Environmental History, 1400-1940** by Richard H. Grove. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

Richard Grove's most recent book is shorter and more accessible than his earlier offering, *Green Imperialism* (1995). Some overlap of themes in the two is not necessarily bad, since the reader can now get at the crux of Grove's 1995 argument without wading through the detail that suffuses the earlier book. In addition, this new book takes the reader on a whirlwind, worldwide tour of conservation thinking and practice between the 17th and mid-20th centuries.

A number of themes run through the first four chapters of the book. Countering arguments put forth by Ramachandra Guha, Madhav Gadgil, Richard Tucker and others, Grove argues that far more than just an economic rationale motivated colonial conservation policies in India and elsewhere. Grove makes a compelling case that genuine environmental concern underlay the activism of the earliest conservationists, pushing the colonial government to adopt environmental regulations in India in the early 19th century.

He goes on to argue that systematic observations by these early conservationists, mainly medical surgeons, helped advance the scientific understanding of environmental consequences linked to deforestation. This scientific enquiry took place at the periphery, rather than within the colonial metropole, contrary to conventional positions on the advancement of science during the 18th and 19th centuries. Whether or not this was cutting edge science is questionable, and I will return to this shortly. In support of his notion of the peripheries as ignored loci of scientific research, Grove convincingly demonstrates that the work of Indian (Scottish, really, but Grove refers to them as Indian) and Australian scientists during the early 19th century played a key role in unearthing links between El Nino and world climate patterns. The accuracy of much of this research has in fact been substantiated over time.

Chapters five and six focus on local-state negotiation over access to forest resources, and Grove makes a number of points. First, restrictive conservation policies of the colonial government may not have been significant departures from restrictive policies imposed by pre-colonial states. Second, it is unclear that marginal communities suffered unduly under these policies; rather, conservation policies may have disturbed existing power relations that formerly denied particular communities access to natural resources. Third, indigenous resistance often forced the British to alter or withdraw particularly harsh restrictions. Grove's call for a re-examination of the nature of local-state negotiations over access to forest resources is well taken.

The argument that the rationale for colonial forest conservation derived primarily from environmental rather than economic concerns is persuasive up until the formation of the Indian Forest Department in the mid-19th century. The argument is less convincing following this institutionalization of conservation policy. The foresters staffing the Forest Department were trained to manage forests to ensure a sustainable supply of economically valuable timber. Correspondingly, the boundaries of reserved forests coincided with tracts of land that had the best stands of timber. Similarly, particular species of trees were reserved outside reserved forests – teak, deodar, pine, sal, and sandalwood. Vast expanses of mixed forest were converted to single-specie plantations – again of teak, deodar, pine and so on. Each of these policies points to the primarily economic interest of foresters in the Indian forests. Greater environmental concern would have been

reflected in a more catholic interest in forest stands and tree species, with prioritization of conservation based on the ecological fragility of an area rather than the purely economic worth of timber species.

Of course, the writings by many foresters suggest a deep concern with the consequences of deforestation. One needs, however, to examine these writings in the institutional context within which they were articulated. Following the formation of the Forest Department, and well into the 20th century, attempts by foresters to bring forest land under the 'scientific' management of the Forest Department were resisted by the Revenue Department, till then the sole government agency controlling access to forest areas. In countering such opposition, foresters routinely indicated that increased flooding, desertification and drought were inevitable consequences of a continuation of unscientific land use practices. Large scale clear felling by the Forest Department, however, suggests an inconsistency in their stated concern with, and their own involvement in, deforestation. Writings by foresters, Grove's primary evidence to support his contention of environmental concern driving environmental policy, need therefore to be seen in light of the power plays of the time, and the political mileage that foresters drew from an alarmist rhetoric.

In suggesting that the colonial periphery was at the cutting edge of scientific enquiry, Grove ignores the fact that many of the soil and water conservation capabilities attributed to forest cover during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries have been discredited in the ecological literature since the 1920s. The link between forests and rainfall is highly dubious; so too is the notion that forests play a critical role in preventing floods. In the absence of forests, other vegetation such as grass and shrubs may be equally effective guardians of soil and water resources. And yet, Grove routinely points to 'empirical observations' by colonial environmentalists of altered rainfall, declining stream flow, increased flooding, increasing desertification and so on, resulting from decreasing forest cover.<sup>1</sup> It is likely then that environmental theory was informing empirical observation, rather than the other way round.

Rhetoric rather than good science was almost certainly at the cutting edge of colonial environmentalism. That the rhetoric survives to this day is at least partially due to its political usefulness, particularly so

1. For a review of this literature, see Bosch and Hewitt (1982). A review of catchment experiments to determine the effect of vegetation changes on water yield and evapotranspiration. *Journal of Hydrology* 55: 3-23.

in the face of continued resistance to conservationist attempts to curb resource consumption within areas of conservation interest. Despite Grove's entertaining, marvellously written, and copiously documented work, I think he misses a key factor which has shaped the international conservation rhetoric.

Vasant K. Saberwal

**THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF FORESTRY  
IN BURMA, 1824-1994** by Raymond L. Bryant.  
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

Bryant's contribution to the growing corpus of literature on the history of state forestry is a well-intentioned effort to examine the operation of the system in Burma. For those focusing on the global aspects of forestry, there is further evidence here of the extension of the many experiments first tried in Burma to other parts of British India. Bryant's study is a narration of the various phases of the state-driven forestry programme in the region. The author admits that the source-base is inadequate since the records in Myanmar could not be accessed when the book was being written (the government of Myanmar has only recently opened its archives for non-nationals).

It would be more useful to address broader methodological and interpretative problems with the book rather than reviewing its substance in detail. Though we appreciate that Bryant's treatise was constrained by lack of local sources, the author should have been more critical in his reading of them. A historical study can no doubt be based on records available in London, itself a rich source of documents, but simple-minded generalisations without evaluating the biases of these sources can be problematic in a book with such a grandiose title.

A scholar who has appended the adjective 'political' to his study of ecological history needs to provide more sophisticated explanations for aspects of historical change. It prompts the discerning reader to the conclusion that perhaps conventional accounts of policy shifts within broader colonising processes are more convincing than the trendy research on much the same history redesignated as ecological studies. For example, the shift from what is *prima facie* accepted as a significant shift from private monopoly to *laissez-faire* may not have been such a drastic change. After all, Bryant shows that complete monopolistic control was not successful in the years before 1853. The following years saw a difference in form and guise in

official policies relating to forests which has been read by the author as a difference in substance. The end of monopoly control by the company was not a shift of its focus from commercial to benevolent activity, but a reorientation of policy to accommodate newly emergent lobbies and to fulfil its own purposes in a more efficient way. Any change in policy orientation is marked by a surfeit of rhetoric denigrating the workings of the earlier procedure and eulogising the new.

The political ecology framework seeks to inquire into the political sources, conditions and ramifications of environmental change. In this book, the term 'political ecology' fails to impress. Political ecology is obviously the study of a particular aspect within political economy. Political economy is a broad paradigm within which one can choose to emphasize a particular aspect, process or relationship. For instance, one can study labour conditions in a particular context. The resultant study does not benefit by being redesignated political labour. The term 'political ecology' is obviously of long standing, but frequent use does not make it any sounder or more substantive.

The use of the term is even less justified in Bryant's case, which is evidently a study of the institutional expansion and working of the forest department in Burma. Neither environmental change nor ecology in the latter's broadest definition figure as separate factors which are given special treatment. The rest of the book uses conventional categories and provides a narrative account of the history of forestry in Burma, an exercise that could well have been accommodated in a political-economic frame of reference. It is difficult to demonstrate, in any case, environmental changes brought about by political-economic changes. There is a lack of documentation, especially of the pre-colonial period. It is intriguing that a process that is quite amenable to description within existing rubrics should suddenly appear under a new guise.

This perhaps only emphasizes the point made earlier that the mode of analysis, by compulsion of adhering to the obvious principles of interpretation, shares fundamental premises with methods that have their origin in ideologies which practitioners of political ecology cannot countenance. It is perhaps the hope of such practitioners that *avoir du pois*, rather than rigour and consistency, will provide a sufficient and operative alternative to the political economy perspective. Elements within political economy relate to one another. The fact that forests (gender issues, law, symbols, representative systems and many others) have not been stressed within the framework so far does not

merit a new rubric. Bryant's proclivity to lean towards American sociology of the non-Marxist tradition is evident in the uncritical citation of the works of Michael Adas, James Scott, Nancy Lee Peluso, Theda Skocpol and Ramachandra Guha. The undue ease with which new conceptual frameworks evolve, which in no way depart significantly from older frameworks, is itself a subject worthy of sociological study.

Third, the account of the forest department in the introductory chapter is one of absolute control, authority and regulation. This seems to stand at odds with the importance assigned in subsequent discussion to resistance. Perhaps it is the case that widespread resistance and authoritative state control can co-exist with relative ease. That resistance does not tantamount to any change in the objective situation in which the protesters find themselves may be reason to appreciate the limits of such insubordination.

The ecology that Bryant tries to highlight appears more as an economic factor than a natural one. The author also fails to draw out the differences between the colonial and the post-colonial states, their nature, orientation and institutional frameworks. This presumably should be the premise on which forest politics crucially rests. In a discussion of the post-1966 policies, Bryant accepts at face value the 'state socialism' of General Ne Win and clubs it with the destruction of the environment by other state socialisms, including that of China.

To conclude, Bryant's study is not informed and serious about either ecology or politics. This book with its empirical strengths would have had great merit if only the empirical detail was located within a sustainable theoretical context. The claims made in the introductory pages rest on flimsy ground. The book, however, contains a wealth of source material for the more equipped.

Stella D'Costa

**THE LAST FRONTIER: People and Forests in Mizoram** by Daman Singh. Tata Energy Research Institute, New Delhi, 1996.

North East India, a region abounding in natural wealth as in cultural diversity, is of great interest to environmentalists and social scientists. Few studies have analysed the needs of the rapidly changing indigenous societies in relation to environmental problems and conservation. People's lives, especially in the hill tracts, are inextricably linked to and dependent upon environmental and forest resources. Understanding

and addressing human needs is therefore an imperative part of designing conservation policies.

*The Last Frontier* breaks new ground in this respect. The focus is on Mizoram, the relatively obscure hill state wedged between Bangladesh and Myanmar. A variety of tribes, such as the Lushais, Paites, Hmars, Mara's, La's, Riangs and Chakmas, people Mizoram. Shifting cultivation or *jhum* in the verdant bamboo and evergreen forests that cover over 80 per cent of the land provides sustenance and occupation to most of the state's people. Mizoram offers an instructive study due to profound historical changes in people and landscapes. The analysis of people and forests in this book is organised in two parts. The first provides an environmental history of Mizoram, thematically exploring changes in belief systems, domains of resource access and use, social institutions governing the exploitation of natural resource, and technology. In the second, the author provides a survey of Mizoram's natural resources, shifting cultivation practices, village and state forest reserves and their management by the people and the state.

The conversion of over 80 per cent of the population from animism to Christianity and from illiteracy to literacy in less than a century (1894-1994) caused fundamental changes in peoples' relationship with their natural environment. This dislodged the superstition and mystique that ordained a central place for nature in human existence and allowed an indigenous rational thought and conception of nature to unfold.

Concurrent to changes in belief systems, political upheavals and reorganisation led to manifold changes in the domains of resource access and use, as well as the social institutions governing them. From a regime of village republics ruled by sovereign chiefs, the political status of Mizoram changed to statehood in 1987, after two decades (1966-1986) of insurgency and a brief period as a union territory. A significant change was the overthrow of the traditional system of chieftainship and its replacement by a democratic system of local self-government by elected village councils. The village council was vested with powers to regulate shifting cultivation or *jhum* and manage the special village safety and supply forest reserves created by state laws. State laws enacted in the 1950s brought about these changes. The author points out that the domains of resource use became increasingly restricted with time because of clear delimitations of political and village boundaries. For the common man, however, the domain actually increased due to the creation of village forest reserves and the implementation of a lot system for selection of *jhum* plots.



The book shatters many myths regarding jhum with compelling arguments based on reinterpretation of secondary data, coupled with primary data and 'general impressions borne out by field enquiry.' The primary data is from visits to six villages and questionnaires canvassed in 36 sample villages. With data from Meghalaya and Mizoram on jhum and recovery of abandoned fallows, the author presents a convincing argument that jhum can be sustainable at fallow cycles of five to ten years depending on site conditions. In addition, she uses historical, demographic, agricultural and local records to argue that there is no evidence to suggest that jhum cycles have declined due to population pressure or land scarcity in most areas.

The claim that jhum causes inordinate soil erosion is also abrogated by data from experiments carried out in Meghalaya by the Indian Council for Agricultural Research. These show that fields cultivated for a year and abandoned (the most common practice in Mizoram) have lower erosion rates than other forms of land use including modern agriculture and horticulture. This is ascribed to multiple cropping and rapid growth of bamboo that secures the soil.

One widespread notion of the destructive potential of jhum that the author finds support for is its impact on native biodiversity. Although the data given in the book is sketchy, this is a conclusion that has been borne out by other recent studies. The complexity and diversity of the rainforest ecosystems and their susceptibility to disturbances, implies a need for areas free from jhum to conserve the region's unique biodiversity.

The analysis of village safety and supply forest reserves is relevant to the present-day debate on community empowerment in the management of natural resources. The author points out that these reserves created by state laws are not 'traditional' as assumed by other authors. Their success is attributable to the control by the village council, which is sensitive to local needs, and factors such as isolation from markets and demographic pressures. Safety reserves, usually surrounding villages and kept free from extraction, were designed to protect the village from fires. As the threats of fires decrease with people moving into occupations other than jhumming and with increasing demand for land for building houses, these reserves are likely to suffer. There is an urgent need for a reappraisal and definition of the legal status and geographical extent of these reserves. Further, their utility as a model to follow and extend to other areas needs to be studied in greater detail. The role of these reserves in conserving

biodiversity, besides providing for people's needs, is also still an open question.

In the concluding section, Daman Singh presents an appraisal of the government's new land use policy (NLUP) begun in 1991. The NLUP aims to provide alternate occupations to every family in Mizoram that depends on jhum. Although laudable in its intentions, there are causes for concern in its implementation, as the village councils have been ignored and sidelined. In the process, regulation of jhum is in disarray at the village level in many NLUP blocks. It is too early to comment on the success of the scheme, but the need for critical monitoring of its implementation is obvious.

This book is an invaluable reference for people interested in shifting cultivation and environmental problems in North East India. It is written in a very readable style and has only a few minor typographical and factual errors. Its major drawbacks are in that the analysis has virtually ignored comparisons with shifting cultivation communities in other parts of the world and in states like Arunachal Pradesh, that it uses a variable and vague conceptualisation of the meaning of 'sustainability', and that it relies heavily on secondary data, often of variable quality.

**T.R. Shankar Raman**

**IN THE BELLY OF THE RIVER: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley** by Amita Baviskar. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

*In the Belly of the River* addresses significant themes in the study of contemporary political agitations that have been termed 'environmental movements'. Of central concern is the question: do tribal subsistence activities, 'traditional' values and political consciousness constitute an inherently valid critique of the current model of development?

Baviskar deliberates on the proposition by exploring and documenting the resistance of the adivasi hill Bhilalas to their imminent displacement by the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The Bhilalas' defense of their lifestyle and resources from further marginalisation propelled them into an intense and direct confrontation with the larger political economy of 'development' in post-independence India. From a position of relative isolation and low equilibrium self-sufficiency, the Bhilalas are now compelled to strike broader social alliances and negotiate the terrain of contemporary politics. It is this context that Baviskar interrogates in

a micro-study which involved a prolonged period of field work as a researcher and partisan activist in the on-going agitation.

To Baviskar's credit, despite her obvious empathy for and association with the movement, the study is sustained by a critical distance from the complex of issues and events. The conclusion, in fact, bears this out by being strikingly blunt and objective. The adivasis (Bhilalas), the author contends, are not currently sustainable resource managers, nor is their relatively egalitarian social organisation bereft of internal tensions and contradictions. In sum, the notion of a homogenous tribal community sustaining both the forests and their culture with an ingrained 'environmental consciousness' is a caricature, propagated by a predominantly urban intelligentsia.

Baviskar arrives at this understanding by historicising the experience of the Bhilalas and by attempting to recover their agency. The argument, therefore, is concentrated on identifying overarching processes of economic and political exploitation that have, over periods of time, marginalised the Bhilalas and compelled them to adopt unsustainable practices in resource use. Resistance to such oppression has, moreover, been a defining feature of the adivasis' history and identity, and far predates the efforts of the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Sangath—two organizations currently active in the submergence zone.

Baviskar, in effect, argues that the romanticizing of the adivasi world or the misrepresentation of their struggle as merely a part of an 'external critique of development', is fraught with the danger of limiting the transformative potential of the movement. Any decisive political perspective on the Bhilalas must therefore develop or have an estimate of both their strengths and their vulnerabilities.

However, like most studies that break fresh ground, *In the Belly of the River* has its share of limitations and omissions. The most glaring of which is, perhaps, Baviskar's presumption that reportage and claims can substitute for evidence. The assertion, for example, that the Narmada Bachao Andolan 'show cases' the tribals while underplaying the role of the landed patidars in the Narmada movement is not supported either by interviews of the Andolan leadership or a rigorous review of its literature and activities, in the absence of which the Andolan's strategy *vis-à-vis* the tribals remains unclear. Similarly, the claim that the Indian 'state' in the post-independence period has eroded the resource base (forests) of the Bhilalas of Jhabua district is unsubstantiated.

The book contains several perfunctory and thin discussions of complex and contentious issues which are thrown up in the introductory pages but never followed through. The section on ecological marxism, for example, barely covers a page and is inadequately defined as a critique of commodity fetishism. In the book's subsequent discussions neither is the methodology of ecological marxism evident nor is the concept's relevance to the whole study brought out. Last, for some inexplicable reason, Baviskar has chosen not to explain the salience of selecting the village Anjanvara for her case study. Surely it could not have been an arbitrary choice?

Despite these criticisms, the book raises several engaging and interesting questions which have been glossed over in most secondary accounts of the anti-dam movement. To add to this, Baviskar's elegant prose and fine-grained sense for detail, dotted with anecdotes, make for a captivating read and will appeal to a wide readership.

Rohan D'souza

#### **BUILDING BRIDGES FOR CONSERVATION:**

**Towards Joint Management of Protected Areas in India** edited by Ashish Kothari, Farhad Vania, Priya Das, K. Christopher and Suniti Jha. Indian Institute of Public Administration, Delhi, 1997.

THIS book is a useful compendium of issues related to joint protected area management. It comprises of nine major 'documents', but each document has several sub-documents attached. Four of these reports comprise of overviews of the situation in India and abroad, proposed changes in India's wildlife legislation, a proposal to expand the system of categories that covers protected areas, and a bibliography on conservation and people. The other three documents are detailed case studies of the Kailadevi Sanctuary in Rajasthan, Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary in Bihar, and the Rajaji National Park. As part of their 'action research', IIPA staff conducted various workshops to sensitise villagers and park officials on each other's views. The resulting reports and resolutions passed have been helpfully enclosed, along with other relevant material such as a summary of Justice Poti's Interim Report on Rajaji for the Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights and the RLEK (a local NGO) plan for community management of Rajaji.

In view of the vast outpouring of material on joint forest management (which is technically confined to

degraded forest lands), it would have been helpful if the differences and similarities between JFM and JPAM had been systematically dealt with. Most of the problems highlighted in the first document are common to both – the absence of a historical understanding of the area, the villager's and lower forest staff's lack of access to available knowledge, the contentious status of such knowledge as is available, and the absence of basic data on social and ecological parameters. Indigenous knowledge is ignored, as are existing community structures of conservation.

The picture really begins to become clear in Document 7 which explains the existing nomenclature dealing with protected areas. The Wildlife Protection Act provides for national parks, which, in theory, are strictly off-limits to humans; sanctuaries, where certain types of rights are allowed; closed areas, where hunting is prohibited; and game reserves where hunting is allowed on license. The first two categories are, however, the most common: India has 80 national parks and 441 sanctuaries covering 4.5 % of its landmass. Thus we see that unlike in ordinary reserve forest areas, local users in and around protected areas are subject to more stringent legal restrictions. In addition, since the rationale for protected areas is conservation rather than serving local needs, the proponents of popular involvement have that much more convincing to do.

The three case studies by Priya Das, K. Christopher and Farhad Vania make interesting reading, both in themselves and as comparative material for each other. Each area has its own peculiar set of variables that must be dealt with in any proposed management plan. In Kailadevi, this includes mining inside the sanctuary and the pressure exerted by migratory Rabari herdsmen. In Dalma, it is the annual sacred hunts or *akhand shikar*, in which approximately 20,000 people take part, damaging the area. In addition, the sanctuary serves as a source of fuelwood to Jamshedpur. While the struggle of the Gujjars in Rajaji is perhaps the most well-known of all these issues, but much less known are affected user groups within Rajaji – former *taungya* workers who were engaged to grow trees and allowed to farm between them, and neighbouring villagers who extract *bhabbar* grass to make ropes. Each document provides a detailed listing of stakeholders and the possible ways their interests may be reconciled, as well as the work of different NGOs in the area. In Kailadevi and Dalma, there are also existing forest protection committees which villagers of forest departments have set up. In Kailadevi there is even an apex body of protecting villages, known as the *Baragaon ki Panchayat*.

The great advantage of this volume is that it provides a clear-eyed, impartial view of existing conditions, lacunae in the law, and what can be done. While obviously engaged in advocacy for the people living in protected areas, the authors account for the views of park authorities and others in a manner that enables future dialogue. To have photographs is, of course, a bonus in any book, but to have such cute cartoons by Rustam Vania is something else entirely. Unfortunately, many of the references in the documents do not find a place in the bibliographies at the end of each document. Minor quibbles apart, the book is a worthy investment for anyone working in this area.

Nandini Sundar

**SUBALTERNS AND SOVEREIGNS: An Anthropological History of Bastar 1854-1996** by Nandini Sundar. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

THIS first book by a young researcher, Nandini Sundar, recounts the political and social history of the Bastar region from the colonial period to the present. It is an 'anthropological history' in that it engages with recent theoretical debates in anthropology in its analysis of state formation and resistance movements. It is also anthropological in its understanding of history as produced by human action and consciousness, mediated through culture.

Sundar is keenly aware of the pitfalls of writing history, especially of regions such as Bastar which lack significant non-official documentation. But rather than follow the subalternist strategy of rescuing silenced voices from the past by reading official texts in novel ways, she opts for a combination of sources – the archives and other documents, ethnographic fieldwork, and oral histories – to help her piece together the story of Bastar and its people. Her aim is not to present a unitary and finished history but to allow several possible histories to emerge.

By sustaining the dialectical tension among different readings and voices, she is able to convey the complexities of this story and of the theoretical problems it poses. This means that any brief synopsis will inevitably do violence to the subtlety of the argument. However, in this review I do little more than attempt such a summary since I cannot find much to argue with in this rich, insightful and thought-provoking book.

Sundar first dispenses with the commonplace notion that 'tribal' areas such as Bastar were totally isolated and static prior to colonialism. She shows that the

pre-colonial economy, society and polity were characterised by a high degree of fluidity and complexity of interaction among the mosaic of people who came to populate the region. She then presents a theory of how the rule of the Kakatiya dynasty (1323-1947) was legitimised through the institution of divine kingship, focusing especially on the annual Dussehra celebration during which the people expressed their loyalty to the king but also ritually affirmed the king's mutual dependence on them. Significantly, this ceremony was reworked by the British into a ritual display of indirect rule and later was taken over by the independent state to represent itself in its 'reformist mode' (p. 75) through the addition of an exhibition and *darbar*.

As the autonomous Bastar state came under indirect colonial rule, Sundar argues, there was a shift from one form of paternalism to another. In the older system, the authority of the king was circumscribed by an obligation to protect and provide just rule to the people, which was reinforced by the threat of rebellion. The British form of paternalism lacked this element of reciprocity between *raja* and *praja*, for colonial power ultimately did not depend on legitimacy. Thus, while the outward form and rituals of 'traditional' kingship were retained and utilised by the colonial power, the significance of the institution changed over time.

In order to map the shifting equations of power and legitimacy among the three actors in this story – the 'indigenous' ruler, the colonial state and the people – Sundar concentrates on a series of critical events which challenged the political order: the rebellions of 1876, 1910 and 1966. She argues that a focus on insurgent moments can yield an understanding of order as well as resistance, and that the rebellions were in fact central to the constitution of structures of power. Thus her narrative moves back and forth between the rebellions and periods of institutional restructuring and entrenchment which followed them.

The rebellion of 1876 is described against the background of changes in the land revenue, judicial and administrative systems wrought by colonialism. This episode demonstrates that the system of indirect rule was expedient for the British not only because it was cheaper but because it enabled resistance to be deflected onto the native ruler. In the 1876 rebellion, directed against an 'unjust' king, the British were able to project themselves as the protectors of the people and upholders of 'custom'. This ushered in a long period of paternalistic rule in Bastar by the colonial state.

By the late 19th century, British paternalism was encroaching more and more on people's everyday

lives, especially after 1888 when the state was taken under the Court of Wards. The most disruptive interventions were the increased demand for corvée labour (*begar*) and direct forest management. While *begar*, which had both ritual and mundane forms, was integral to the structure and legitimacy of the pre-colonial state, under colonialism its scope and significance was greatly altered: it was transformed into a pure system of conscripted labour for the state's public works projects, especially road building. The construction of roads, seen by the British as bringing 'civilisation' to Bastar, ironically was accomplished through the presumably uncivilised use of forced labour. Moreover, improved communications facilitated the exploitation of local resources for the benefit of non-*adivasi* groups, and enabled new trading groups to move in and occupy crucial niches in the expanding market economy.

The aim of direct forest management was to gain access to the timber needed for the building of the Empire and to generate resources by regulating and taxing the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). In addition, the need to ensure a labour supply required increased control over shifting populations, which was accomplished through changes in the law and judicial process. The new policy turned most villagers into 'criminals' overnight, who consequently were brought under the expanding judicial system for offences such as grazing cattle on the very lands they had occupied for generations. The main target of the authorities was, of course, shifting cultivation, which was regarded as wasteful as well as unremunerative for the state, and the government promoted settled agriculture by encouraging outsiders to settle in Bastar. In all of these developments the roots of present conflicts and struggles can be clearly discerned.

By the early 1900s the state had assumed ownership of all the land, to which people were granted access in accordance with rational forest and land use policies. This marked a complete transformation from the pre-colonial situation when peoples' access to land and resources was governed by a complex of religious beliefs and subsistence practices and organised mainly through the kinship system. The forest policy came into direct conflict with local beliefs that cultivation and village sites were 'gifts' to particular lineages from the 'Earth': for the *adivasis*, displacement or curtailment of shifting cultivation was much more than economic injury. Ironically, this redefinition of peasant's forest rights as privileges granted by the state, to be paid for by labour or cash, later came to be seen as 'customary'.

In this context, it is no coincidence, as Sundar points out, that the 1910 rebellion (*Bhumkal*) began in those very areas where forest reservation was first imposed. This rebellion, which lasted several months and was put down harshly by the colonial authorities, led to further entrenchment of British control. It also produced a debate on the 'tribal question' and some changes in policy. From the 1920s, Bastar was governed by a series of anthropologically-minded administrators who argued for the preservation of tribal cultures, which they thought needed protection from the detrimental influence of Hindu society (a view that ignored the long history of interaction between plains 'Hindus' and hill peoples). This isolationist policy, partly put in place through the codification of 'customary law' and a village panchayat system, produced a particular image of 'tribes' that persists till today, of people who are innocent and in need of uplift but also dangerous and requiring repression.

The debate between preservationists and integrationists (among the latter, nationalists who resented any challenge to the idea of a unitary Indian 'nation') spilled over into the post-independence period and was partially resolved by Nehru's policy of 'controlled integration'. Sundar's account of this period demonstrates how the post-colonial state largely continued the colonial policies *vis-à-vis* tribals, both paternalistic and repressive, through its reservation system, protectionist laws and 'development' programmes. Yet the degree of exploitation of Bastar's people and resources has increased drastically since 1947. The penetration of Bastar by outside commercial interests and government projects, and widespread felling of forests, have led to further disruption in the livelihoods and social organisation of local people.

It is in this context that the 1966 rebellion, led by the last Kakatiya king, Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo, must be understood. Pravir successfully employed the symbols and rituals of divine kingship to lead a people's struggle against the state. Sundar shows how each successive rebellion contains echoes of earlier ones, and how popular memory feeds into contemporary struggles. However, she argues that the form which this rebellion took should not be interpreted as a reflection of a 'pure' pre-colonial peasant consciousness, but as a 'consciously historical mode of organisation, i.e. one that invoked past myth as a guide to present action' (p. 232).

The debate on assimilation has been revived recently with the proposal to include Bastar under the 6th Schedule. But in the earlier debate, as well as today, there has been a failure to recognise that Bastar

was, and is, already deeply embedded in the wider capitalist economy, not least because the forest departments, mines and plantations draw up on the labour and resources of 'tribal' areas. The isolationists notion that a 'traditional' way of life existed which can be preserved, was misplaced even in the 1950s. But ironically the same ideas continue to be reproduced in new contexts. The argument for special treatment for 'indigenous' people runs the danger of promoting a reactionary nativism in which the interests of certain 'primordial' groups supersede those of others who might be equally oppressed.

Sundar's analysis of the three episodes of rebellion focuses attention on the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the people. While present conflicts are usually presented in terms of adivasis against the state, these struggles – around the collection and sale of NTFPs, logging, and development projects – foreground issues of development and the direction it should take. These are issues which strike at people's livelihoods, and therefore, although they may be articulated in terms of 'indigenous' rights, pit those who stand to gain from further development along present lines against those who would lose. Herein lies the value of histories such as this one, beyond their academic interest. In formulating a position on such issues it is helpful to know the source of the ideas on which various claims are based.

As Sundar says: 'Any honest attempt to address the "tribal question" must... eschew the idea of harmonious pre-capitalist village communities which are as much of a myth as the notion that activists are motivated by a desire to keep tribals in museums. The question today is one of the effects of capitalism and the struggle for democracy at large, which is fought in culturally specific ways. In the process, culture too is created anew' (pp. 189-90).

This book will be valuable for any scholar of Indian history, politics or sociology, for those concerned with people's movements, or for anyone who is thinking about the state and its future. For, as Sundar compellingly shows, the future can only be constructed out of the remnants of the past. Perhaps a better understanding of the past, especially of people's resistance movements and the forms of consciousness which impelled them, can yield new ideas for the future, new models of governance, and make economic organisation less oppressive and dehumanising than what we have today.

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#### SEMINAR ISSUES

**The Politics of Ecology** (330), February 1987. **Managing Our Natural Resources** (406), June 1993. **Parks and People** (426), February 1995. **Grassroots Governance** (438), February 1996.

# Comment:

## Gandhi's notion of ahimsa and the human-nature relationship

THE growth of environmental awareness has led to a re-evaluation of the relevance and significance of the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). The focus has mainly been on the implications of choices of technology and scales of production on the environment and on the ethical underpinnings of an alternative notion of development. One important suggestion in Guha's perceptive cameo of a study is that Gandhi's ideas had more to do with the 'village' than the 'forest' or the 'city'. The careful use of resources within the cultivated settlements was more important to the Mahatma than either the issues that concerned the adivasis or other forest-dependent people or the inhabitants of the growing cities and towns. It was caste Hindu village India rather than the mill workers or the forest-users which was the focal point of his concerns (Guha 1993).

The question examined here has a bearing on the wider debates but is focused on his notion of non-violence *vis a vis* non-human life and how he, as well as some among his followers, tried to put these into practice. The impact of vegetarianism among the Vaishnavas in his native Saurashtra is too well-known to require fresh recounting. It had not only Sanatan Dharma roots, but also Jain antecedents. It was, however, in his student days in England that Gandhi began to develop a philosophy around such beliefs. The interaction with Henry S. Salt as a law student in London was as important as the imprint of the likes of Ruskin and Tolstoy. Salt, the former Eton schoolmaster who influenced Gandhi, was more than a champion of strict vegetarianism. He also opposed fox-hunting, which was then, as now, a major leisure pursuit among the landed gentry and their middle class imitators. His

campaigns for the conservation of wild flowers were later to win support from leading members of the political class (Winsten 1951: 55, 118, 173).

Though Gandhi met Salt and was deeply impressed by his advocacy of animal rights, he did not draw upon his other concerns. This omission may have had a wider logic. Salt was to aggressively take up the issues of hunting and wild flowers a little later than in the early 1890s when he and Gandhi first met. More crucially, the young Mohandas saw the issue of vegetarianism in the light of a re-evaluation of religious teachings: It was no coincidence that he came across a copy of the Holy Bible for the first time in a vegetarian eating house in London (Nanda 1972: 12-13). Compassion extended beyond humans to animals but this did not lead to any sustained engagement with the conservationist concerns of some of his contemporaries.

Yet, the question of human-animal relations resurfaced in the very early stages of his public life. The founding of *ashrams* where life would be organised according to an alternative set of principles was Gandhi's major preoccupation. These included Phoenix in Natal, Sabarmati and Sevagram in India. The aesthetic dimensions of nature were in the background in comparison to another Indian who attempted constructive work in a rural setting, namely Tagore. While he shared Gandhi's apprehensions about the destructive impact of city life, the poet in Tagore identified with features of the landscape with far greater sensitivity. In Gora, for instance, the protagonist walks on the riverside entranced by its beauty, which 'had not been invaded by the ugliness which commercial greed has brought in its train' (Tagore 1924, 1965: 106).

Despite this, Gandhi's later attempts to work out a way of applying his principles of tolerance *vis a vis* the animal world require a closer look. The formulation of the concepts and practice of *satyagraha* or the

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was a genuine votary of this philosophy, he knew several Jains who fell short of such standards (Gandhi, CW, 25 November and 25 October 1926, CW, vol. 7: 73 and 31: 505-7). There was all too real a danger that ahimsa, instead of being a broad idea, was becoming the 'monopoly of a few timid vaishyas' (Gandhi, 4 November 1926, CW, vol. 31: 524). It would be easy for the mercantile communities to speak of non-killing as the *sine qua non* of ahimsa. But this would only evade the wider problem of their own actions in daily life that increased pain, suffering and violence. By domesticating animals, men had already denied other beings their freedom. The question was of how the line could be drawn in such a way as to root out the desire to hurt other living things. This, and not the mere absence of killing, was ahimsa in action.

Such choices were indeed faced by the next generation of Gandhians. A diverse and mixed crew, their divisions and beliefs are beyond the scope of this paper. But an experience of his disciple Mira Behn at her ashram in the foothills of the Himalaya is illuminating. Gandhiji's own ashrams on the Sabarmati and in Wardha were in largely deforested countryside where the plough and axe had replaced the jungle with villages and fields. Mira's choice of a site was different, being influenced by a love for the mountains, their trees and birds, the wild animals and scenery. The awareness of nature's beauty was a constant and abiding feature of her life. But the process of founding a homestead was far from easy. In 1948, it was necessary in Pashulok Ashram to beat pots and pans at night to scare away wild elephants. She was happy that the forest had a resident tiger. When cattle lifting by the tiger threatened the livelihood of the local pastoralist Gujjars, a hunter sat up on a *macchan* and shot the animal. In her writings about the incident, she echoed Gandhi's view: 'You did us great wrong,' she said (addressing the tiger!), 'I am very sorry about your death. But we had to kill you because we were helpless.' Again, there was a choice between two evils, not an easy one (Gupta 1992: 25-27).

There is a simple but powerful way in which the Mahatma and some of his apostles attempted to address this dilemma. Conflicts often lead to intolerance not only between different groups of people but also with respect to the natural world. Ahimsa was a credo that held the seeds of a solution. But in its application, a practitioner had to be sensitive to the under-privileged, whether the mill worker threatened by stray dogs or the cattle-keeper in conflict with tigers. The wider implications of this are significant. While development

cannot be about economic growth alone, urban environmentalists and animal rights activists can do much more to emulate the Mahatma. Sensitivity to the animal world has to combine with equal attention to disadvantaged people if one is to make any headway. A narrow notion of coexistence can be as damaging as the consumerist notions of development that it seeks to displace.

At the same time, the ideological content of Gandhi's thought has to be assimilated more critically than is often the case. He was not simply drawing on tradition but was critically re-interpreting it. This process was not carried out in the abstract but was often shaped by his engagement with real problems on the ground. At times, these took him well off what most scholars see as the beaten track of his concerns with the village and the peasant. The 'stray dogs' case was a classically urban problem and he saw it as an index of the decay of life in the city. The breakdown of communitarian structures was itself responsible for the existence of stray dogs. He did not see any easy way out by letting the dogs live. That he drew an analogy with villagers confronted by carnivores was instructive. There was no easy choice. The practitioner of non-violence had to evolve responses to real problems, not generate ideal solutions. The abiding relevance of this point in both the city and the forest in India today could provoke a more rigorous re-evaluation of Gandhian thought and practice than the very brief attempt made in this paper.

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'struggle for truth' first took place not in India but in South Africa. The Phoenix settlement in Natal province abounded in vipers and other poisonous species of snakes that were a potential threat to human life. Both here and in the ashram at Sabarmati near Ahmedabad, founded in 1917, there was a policy of not killing the reptiles. He also endorsed the superstition among inmates that by not harming the snakes, they too were left alone in turn (Gandhi 1927: 46).

In his public interventions, he was confronted with much more difficult choices. None was to be as controversial in this sphere as the case of the stray dogs of Ahmedabad. This was the only area in which Gandhi had a sustained and long-term interaction with the urban working class. Though heterogeneous in religious terms, they were largely Gujarati speaking. The city also had a significant presence of trading castes — Bania, Marwari and Jain. The spark came due to the actions of the mill-owner Ambalal Sarabhai, a close associate of the Mahatma.

In 1926, a number of rabid stray dogs that had become a menace to workers were shot dead in Ahmedabad at the instance of Sarabhai. Unfortunately, the dead bodies of the dogs were taken in open carts through the market on a day when the *bazaar* was humming with activity. There was outrage among the traders who staged a *hartal* or closure in protest against the cruelty meted out to the animals. The only point on which the two sides could agree was to have the Mahatma arbitrate on the issue. Sarabhai felt he was protecting the workers, his critics that he was being needlessly cruel to living beings.

What is notable is that Gandhi disappointed the traders (Erikson 1967: 422-3). His correspondence on the subject continued for a period of over two years in the pages of his journals, *Navjeevan* and *Young India*. In these articles, he distinguished between his individual belief in *ahimsa* or non-violence and the application of the principle in everyday life. The very existence of stray dogs was an indicator of the irresponsible nature of human society. He did not and could not advocate the wiping out of dogs or any other creatures as a class (Gandhi, 11 November 1926 and 2 December 1926, CW, vol. 27: 14-16 and 28:379). But if there was a choice to be made between a child and a poisonous snake, he would be with the child whose life was in danger. In an article entitled, 'Is this humanity?', he asked if the *ahimsak* (the practitioner of non-violence) did not even have the right to kill in defence of the weak. The reply was in the affirmative. To simply preach coexistence was a luxury. Working out how to apply

it was, the acid test of the practitioner (Gandhi, 25 November 1926, CW, vol. 27: 72-3).

The wider principle that emerged from the incident was that compassion for animals ought not to be seen in isolation. This could not exclude taking difficult decisions. There was ample room for coexistence. Aware of the conflicts in village India where carnivorous animals could pose a threat to flocks of sheep or cattle, Gandhi responded with a sophisticated argument. Villagers often considered it a duty to kill tigers or lions in self-defence. But it was still possible to look forward to a future where life would be different. All animals were our brethren, even the lion and the tiger. It was 'because of our ignorance that, we do not even know how to befriend them. Today, he does not even know how to befriend a man of a different religion or from a different country (Fischer 1950: 238).

In line with the parables of holy men being able to commune with the most ferocious of beasts, of Buddha and the raging tuskier, or of St. Francis of Assisi and the wolf of Gubio, Gandhi hoped to break even this last barrier between human and animal. The pure idealism was nothing short of utopian, but fits in quite well with his general belief in the ability to transform human nature through restraint and to conquer one's adversary with compassion. But his ideal worldview was tempered by calculations that might have appealed to those who lived in proximity to the great beasts of the forest, and sometimes had to defend themselves or their livelihood from attacks. Yet, defence was to be a last resort and not a first response.

The criticisms that greeted such a stance were what led to the series of articles in the journals. But the repartee is also useful for another, more significant reason. Though Gandhi was widely seen as having carried forward older notions of *ahimsa* as propounded by teachers such as Mahavira and other religious leaders, his own reading of the past was sophisticated, if innovative. If he could endorse religion to avoid the wholesale killing of snakes, he could be much more self-critical in other cases. A correspondent asked him how he could ignore the verse that, 'One should not kill even a beast of prey, even if this saves the life of many.' Another critic, this time a Jain visitor, suggested he was violating the letter and spirit of non-violence.

Refuting these ideas, he went well beyond invoking contingency and duty to curb dangerous beasts and poisonous snakes. *Ahimsa*, he felt, was not a monopoly of the Jains, or any other group. In any case, the absence of killing living beings was a critical, but not the sole part of the philosophy of *ahimsa*. While the Mahavira

## The film-maker as activist

IN post colonial India, the genre of the documentary was intrinsically tied up with the ideology of development. In the 1950s and '60s, film, television and radio were regarded as catalysts of modernization, which would involve mass 're-education' through the media, leading to a modern, rational, materialist, democratic culture. In this discourse, 'tradition' was constructed as the main enemy and development strategies aspired towards marketing a new set of discourses related to the body, the family, population, production techniques and the institutions of the state.

This opened up space for various 'experts' to insert themselves as an 'us' (who are middle class/urban/literate), 'using' media artifacts to transform a 'them' (who are poor/rural/illiterate). Documentary film-makers, under the aegis of the state controlled Films Division, celebrated the promise of modernization. There was little space for dissenting voices and marginal(ised) visions. The independent film-maker was beholden to the state for his/her survival. This undoubtedly had its implications for the range of issues tackled – by and large, documentaries tended to stick to 'safe' subjects like art and culture and to the accepted modes of representation.

It is only from the mid-70s that one saw the gradual rise of the 'activist' documentary film, independent of state patronage. Low budget and made with meagre technical resources, many of these films posed a critique of the dominant politico-economic system. They were not the best in terms of craftsmanship, their modes of distribution were limited, and they were screened largely for interested groups, in community or educational settings. With access to video becoming widespread in the '80s, there was a boom in independent documentary production. Many movements in conflict with the state's agenda began to use video. While recognising the contribution of these activist films in providing a voice to marginalised groups and critically interrogating the promise of modernity and progress, we need to rethink the modes of representation used by these films.

Many of these documentaries tend to look at issues in black and white terms. The film-maker becomes, as it were, a mediating entity located outside the relationships of power that (s)he is 'representing'. Accordingly, sympathetic urban middle class viewers could unambiguously situate themselves on the side of 'the people', without having to implicate themselves in these processes. The 'unsympathetic' can dismiss

these films as 'biased' rhetoric. There is a clear-cut dichotomy between the 'good (poor) guys' and the 'bad (elite) guys'. The film-maker becomes an intrepid detective who reveals the machinations of the 'bad guys' to the public. In many cases the film-maker's presence, his/her witnessing the event, is documented for the general public to see. The film-maker was here!

Power flows in this genre of film tend to be two-dimensional, with all oppression stemming from identifiable power sources (the elite, the state, big business) impinging on people, who are constituted as homogenous, cohesive communities, who are always 'right', and thus, imbuing political questions with a moral ring. By allying him/herself with the 'people', the film-maker escapes the onus of self-reflexivity.

The problem with media representations that work with clearly demarcated categories of oppressor and oppressed is that the average urban viewer (usually a sympathiser of the cause being espoused by the film) cannot situate him/herself in any of the above categories. In a study conducted by one of the authors in a working class locality in Goa, public awareness messages on television, which were targeted specifically at the 'masses', were seen as not intended for them by the viewers themselves. The general tendency was to relay these messages to someone else 'more backward', in need of the emancipatory potential of these messages! At the heart of these relaying processes is a dividing practice, originally employed by the sender, in turn redeployed by the 'targets', to invent an 'other' to whom these messages could be eternally transmitted, to a no man's land, for nobody. In effect, the potential of the medium to subvert constituted identities of the viewer (and the film-maker) goes unutilised. The flows of power inherent in these constitutive practices remain unquestioned.

The recognition that any process of representation, such as the act of film making, is an exercise of power/knowledge, would perhaps work towards a critique of the 'normal', the 'everyday', in other words a critique of our own praxis as film-makers, activists. Such an exercise becomes increasingly crucial, given that satellite television is domesticating several of the issues that were once the exclusive realm of 'alternative' film-makers, and an increasing fetishisation of the environment by channels like Discovery begins to set the norms for what constitutes a 'good documentary'.

ANJALI MONTEIRO  
and K. P. JAYASANKAR

# Backpage

IS the Buddha smiling? To explode three nuclear devices on the auspicious occasion of Buddha Purnima is blasphemy. It definitely goes against the grain of the Enlightened One's teachings. But then our nuclear estate, our national security establishment and our political class have rarely displayed any trace of enlightenment.

'This is a day all Indians should be proud of,' cooed our Prime Minister, a statement dutifully echoed by all partners in the ruling alliance, leaders of the opposition parties and editorial writers in the fourth estate. Opinion surveys report that their sample respondents were bursting with pride at the great and historic achievement. India had now joined the only club that matters – the club of the nuclear weapon states.

Our scientists have done themselves proud. The debacles of MBT, the LCA or other defense projects can now be safely buried. We have shown the world what we are capable of, given clear goals and unilateral backing. And now having given to ourselves qualities that were rarely apparent – national pride, tenacity of purpose, goal-oriented action – we can rest in peace.

Our security environment has ostensibly improved. After all, we have shown the Pakis their proper place and given clear signal to China that we are not to be trifled with. The apprehension that this series of 'tests' will push Pakistan into exploding its own device, or shift the tenuous balance of power between the civilians and the military does not matter. Nor one suspects does the fuelling of a military (now nuclear) race in the sub-continent. We are, remember, a bigger power and any effort by Pakistan to match us will further cripple them.

The only niggling concern expressed has been about the inevitable sanctions – the cutbacks on aid and loans, the suspension of project talks, or the reduced inflow of funds by foreign investors, thereby affecting the Sensex. But then, our newly discovered machismo, fuelled by American double-speak, has not left the industry unfounded. We can now go *swadeshi* with greater gusto, impose additional import duties, up the tax rates, reduce subsidies. In short, put reforms on the backburner.

To those who do not share this gung-ho mindset, and one must admit that their numbers are depressingly small (at least in the interim), the entire logic appears bizarre. India, quite correctly, had been at the forefront of the movement for a ban on weapons of mass destruc-

tion. It also rightly opposed the CTBT and NPT treaties – given that they further skewed an already skewed global power balance.

Everyone agrees that nuclear weapons should never be deployed, that their use leave no victors. As Achin Vanaik so perceptively notes, 'A nuclear war between two rivals capable of inflicting major nuclear damage on each other must never be fought and cannot in any meaningful sense be won. That is to say, unlike conventional weapons and wars; you cannot have nuclear security through the use of nuclear weapons but only through their non-use.' (*Seminar* 444)

Why then did we do what we did? One argument is that having conducted the tests, we can now sign the CTBT, possibly when Bill Clinton comes visiting. Having joined the club, and having generated the necessary data, we can now play with computer simulations to improve our nuclear weapons capability. The treaty only bans further tests, not weapon development or stockpiling.

As important, what should not be lost sight of is that the government, so far seen as weak, divided and indecisive, has suddenly won the domestic image war. The opposition has been pushed on the back-foot. The stage has been set for a stiffer budget – *swadeshi* style.

Stretch this a little further. The current euphoria will not last indefinitely. So a harder line against Pakistan cannot be ruled out. We have, after all, some 'legitimate' excuses. And the Pakistani establishment, being no different from ours, can be relied upon to provide additional reasons to act decisively. All this appears a leaf out of Indira Gandhi's book. Remember 1972. Engage in a skirmish, dismiss a few state governments, and go to the polls for an outright win. Plausible. Even feasible.

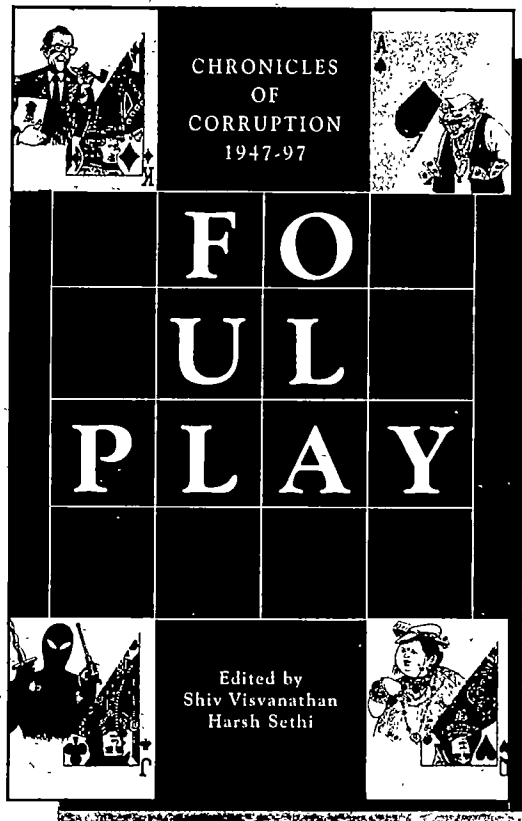
National pride when suffused with jingoism is dangerous. More so when the clarion call is for unity against an external enemy. A classic situation for the suppression of dissent. One just wishes that our leadership had displayed the same purposefulness in solving more elementary problems – of drinking water, of pollution control, of making better roads, or whatever. Maybe then we could really be proud to be Indians in India today. But as the poet says, 'That, my friend, is blowing in the wind.'

Harsh Sethi

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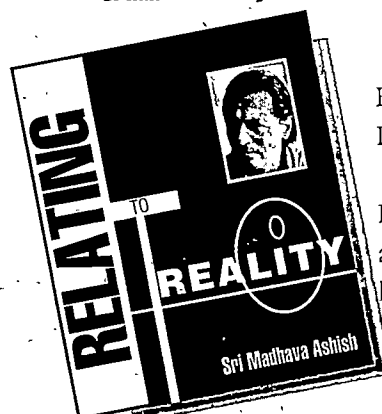
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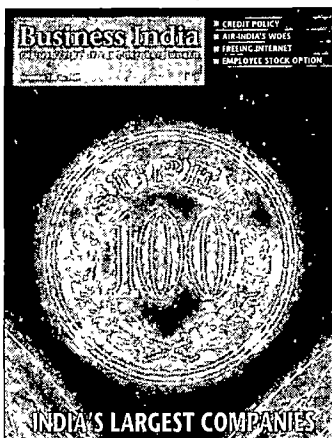
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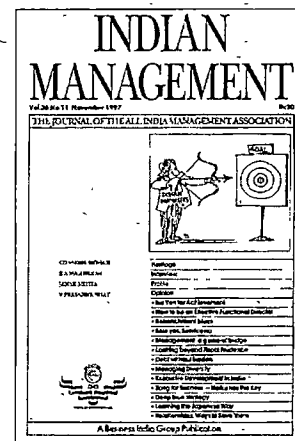
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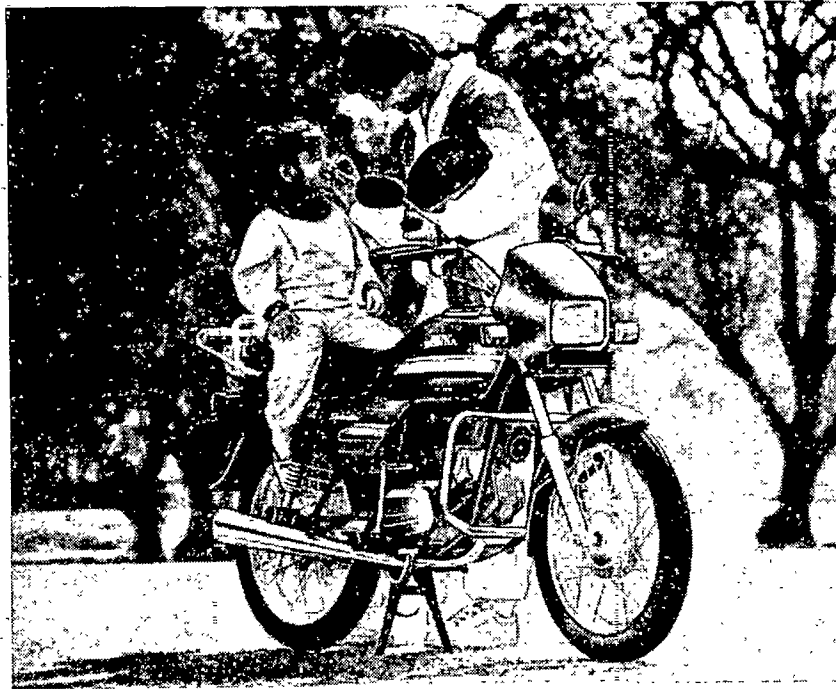
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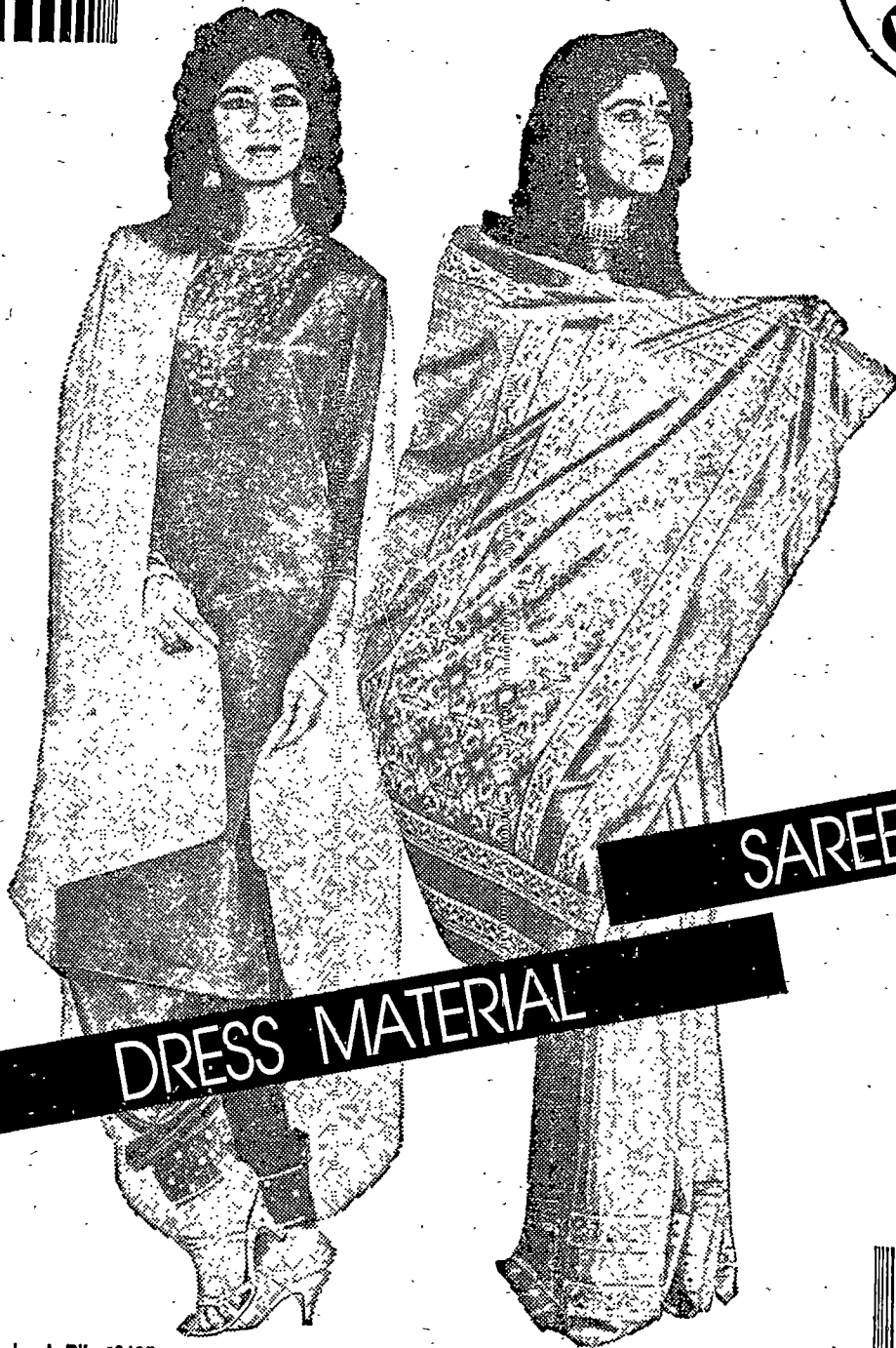


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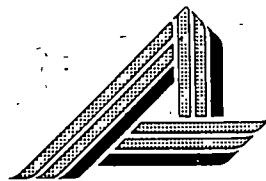
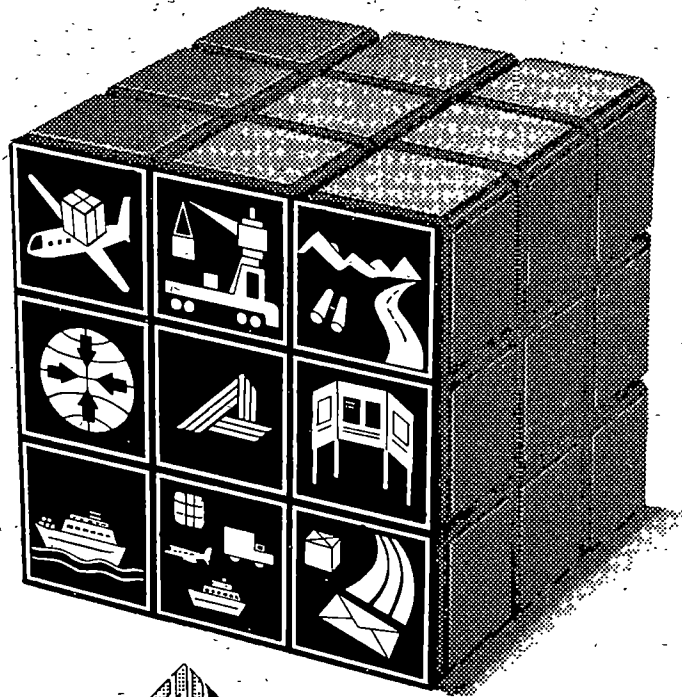
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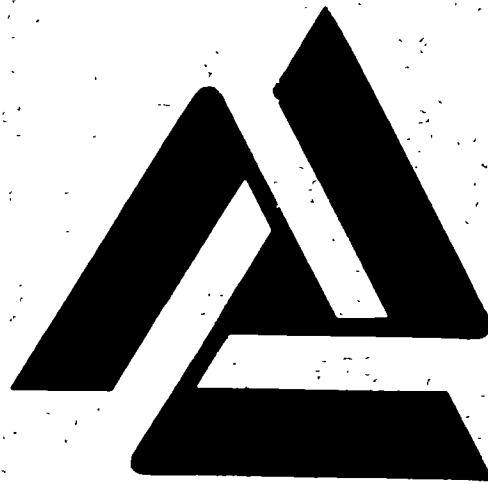
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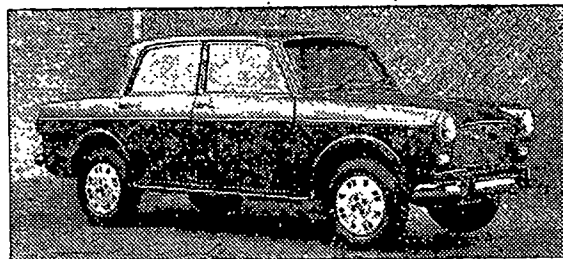
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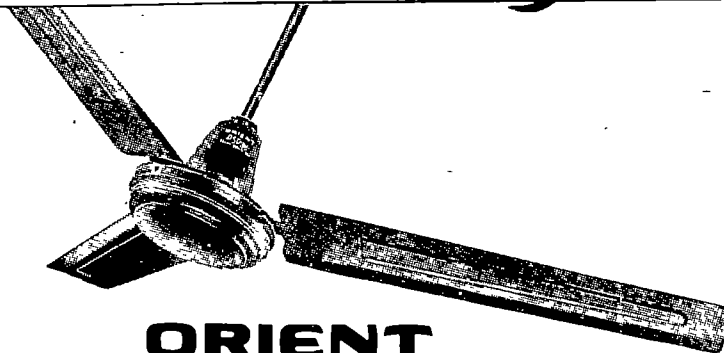
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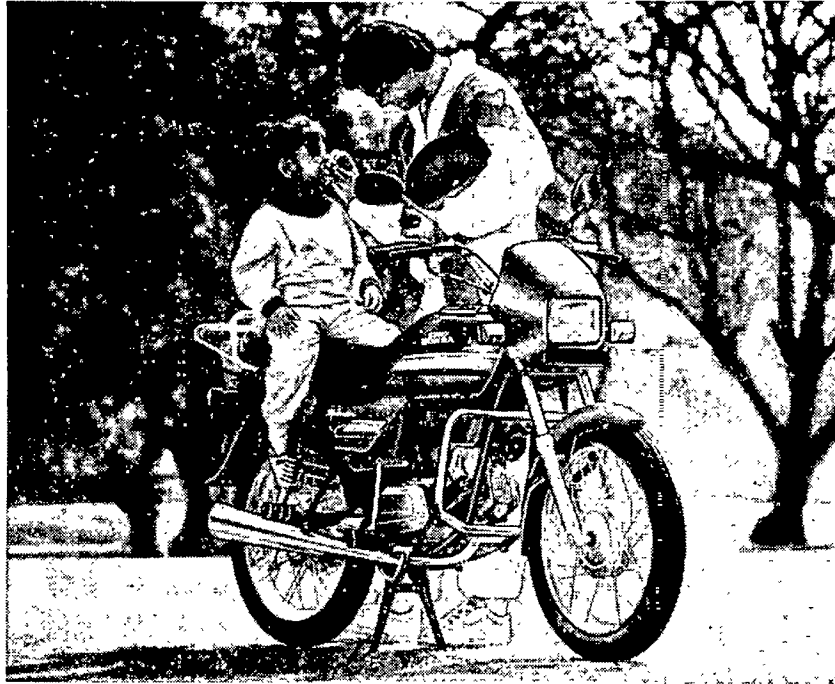


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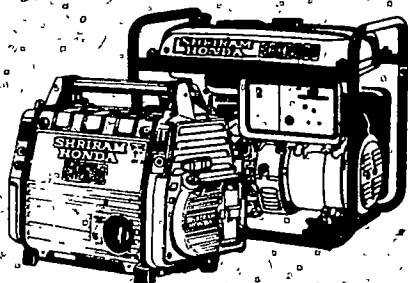
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a symposium on

the conservation of

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symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
Posed by **Ashis Banerjee**, Secretary and Executive Director, INTACH, Delhi
- 14 **CIVILIZATIONAL CONCERNS**  
**B.P. Singh**, scholar and civil servant; currently Home Secretary, Government of India, Delhi
- 21 **TOWARDS AN INDIAN CHARTER**  
**A.G. Krishna Menon**, architect and conservationist; Director, TVB School of Habitat Studies, Delhi
- 27 **NEED FOR LEGISLATION**  
**Vrinda Grover**, consultant, Legal Cell, INTACH, Delhi
- 30 **INSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS**  
**M. Velayudhan Nair**, Officer on Special Duty, Department of Culture, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram
- 33 **SHOWCASING HERITAGE**  
**Ashis Banerjee**, Secretary and Executive Director, INTACH, Delhi
- 37 **STAND AND DELIVER**  
**Vivek Malhotra**, consultant in the arts and media, Delhi
- 40 **REMINISCENCES OF A CONSERVATOR**  
**O.P. Agrawal**, Director General, Indian Council of Conservation Institutes, Lucknow
- 44 **PLOUGHING A LONELY FURROW**  
**Rupika Chawla**, conservator of paintings and author, Delhi
- 48 **A PAINTER OF VISIONS**  
**Jyotirmaya Sharma**, Assistant Editor, 'The Times of India', Delhi
- 51 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by **Sumanta Banerjee**, **Harsh Sethi**, **Bishnu Mohapatra**, **Ratnakar Tripathy** and **Gautam Bhatia**
- 58 **COMMENT**  
Received from **Ranjit Sethi**, IFS; recently retired as India's Ambassador to France
- 62 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by **Madhu Chowdhury** of Dilip Chowdhury Associates

# The problem

FOR a society with as rich and varied a heritage as India the quality and extent of its conservation efforts often causes a great deal of concern. This anguish becomes even more acute when we see what other societies, much more recent and with much less to be proud of, do to protect and showcase their heritage.

Why is this so? Is it that we have no interest, no pride in our past? This hardly seems tenable given that our leaders never tire of extolling the virtues of Indian civilization. Or is it, as some have sought to argue, that India and Indians are ahistorical, in the western sense of the term. What we value are living traditions, not relics of the past. Or is it that conservation is seen as an elitist concern – one that involves large sums of money, in addition to technology and expertise, that a poor society like ours just cannot afford?

Conservation of our man-made heritage – buildings, temples, forts, even cities or, at another level, paintings, statues, manuscripts and so on – is in its essence a reflection of a political decision taken by a society and its leadership. This becomes even more marked since choices have to be and are made about what to conserve and how. In a society where each site, each symbol, is riven with conflicting claims – of use, of ownership – choice becomes a complex exercise. Should we direct our scarce resources towards the Taj or the ruins of Hampi, the cave temples with their intricate rock-cut images and wall paintings or the wooden architecture of Kerala?

The choice of the site, the period, the style, is reflective of the symbolic value that our society, more so the current generation, invests in our heritage. The tussle is not merely symbolic – whether we want to foreground our Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, colonial or syncretic past. There is also an extant material conflict, particularly over sites. The Taj, for instance,

is surrounded by hundreds of small foundries and factories. Adequately protecting the monument may involve, as the Supreme Court judgement indicates, relocating many of these and this can never be easy or painless.

It is our belief that though the term conservation is generally used in limited and specialised circles, it affects all of us as citizens. Even in our sub-conscious, most of us have an affinity with some monument, some building, some place of worship which has a historical origin. India's built heritage as well as the art works which go with them is multi-layered and regionally diverse. It is this enormous variety which has contributed to our essentially tolerant cultural legacy. It helps us read our history as a complex mosaic in which everyone has a place. Conserving this heritage, therefore, is not merely a transmission of historical memory for Indians but for the world citizen.

The task of exploring, excavating and preserving this legacy primarily falls on the Archaeological Survey of India and the state archaeology departments as well as art conservation institutions such as the National Museum in Delhi, the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta and the National Research Laboratory for the Conservation of Historic Property in Lucknow. We now also have NGOs like INTACH, the Indian Heritage Society and others who have begun to take on some of these responsibilities. Attention is also turning towards the historic properties which underline the special characteristic of cities such as Calcutta, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Chennai – their precincts, streetscapes, historic landscapes, gardens, even natural features such as lakes and rock formations.

Conserving all this requires both funds as well as human resources. India may have made some progress, especially in comparison to other develop-

ing countries, but it is a moot point whether it has done all that it could have. Its vast potential still lies unused and unexploited. Only 16 sites in a land of such immense variety have been recognised as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Have we then failed to protect our rich legacy appropriately? While many of our heritage sites languish in obscurity, difficult to access, others are becoming victims of ungainly developments in their surroundings.

If there is a failure of will, then it surely needs to be addressed. Or is it that we suffer the usual malaise of inadequate coordination between the various agencies mandated to support the different conservation bodies? Or is it that fresh thinking and action is needed to make our heritage sites visitor friendly through better site management, interpretation centres and so on. It does appear that some premier organisations like the ASI have begun to acknowledge the difficulties involved and have initiated steps to source inputs from other specialised agencies.

A major problem is that our conservation strategy, such as it is, is much too officialised and expert oriented. There is a palpable fear of involving the people in this cultural project. Notwithstanding constant refrain about shortage of funds, little effort has been made to involve corporate entities and private trusts in investing in, adopting, contributing to and managing our heritage sites. Why, even the Japanese aid to develop key Buddhist sites remains unutilised.

Within conservation circles there are numerous debates with regard to the principles of conservation, authenticity in conservation, the different philosophical approaches to conservation and so on. Two issues, however, tend to crop up repeatedly. One has to do with the impact of tourism on conservation; the other

whether a poor country can afford to conserve. The two are related. If one supports a view that tourism is inherently antithetical to conservation, then one axiomatically rules out the possibility of generating revenues through this route. This may well strengthen the resource paucity argument.

Without for a moment underplaying the hazards – aesthetic, ecological, cultural – of unbridled tourism, it does need to be recognised that only if the mass of the people have a chance to visit and appreciate our heritage, can we generate the interest and goodwill required for successful conservation. We need to conserve given the intrinsic civilizational worth of our heritage; it is this that makes us what we are. Generating revenues through intelligent site management is an additional bonus.

Equally important is the need to protect our heritage sites and buildings through appropriate conservation legislation. Legislators act only if there is public pressure. Possibly because our buildings and sites are kept wrapped up in officialdom, barring Hyderabad and Mumbai, none of our cities, even the oldest, Benaras, are protected by legislation. No wonder, Ghalib's house in the walled city of Delhi is being used as a coal depot and historic buildings in Mehrauli are being converted to shopping arcades.

It is time that we move beyond these debates and assess how the conflicting claims in the conservation enterprise are reconciled in other countries, not just those of the West but also closer home such as Sri Lanka and China. We also need to initiate fresh dialogue between different sectors and agencies with a stake in conservation. This issue of *Seminar* is a small attempt in this direction.

ASHIS BANERJEE

# Civilizational concerns

B. P. SINGH

WHY does one love India? Is it because one is a citizen of this country; because one owns a house here or one has his friends, relations, forefathers living in this land; or is it something deeper? Rabindranath Tagore aptly answers this question in his essay, 'A Vision of Indian History': 'I love India, not because I cultivate the idolatry of geography, nor because I have had the chance to be born in her soil, but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great sons.' This love has both tangible and intangible expressions. One has to preserve both. This is a challenge which is more than 5000 years old.

India, Egypt, Iraq, Greece and China have been recognised as the five cradles of human civilization. The ancient civilization of India, however, differs from the others in that its traditions have remained intact to the

present day. In this respect it is like China. In fact, both India and China can claim to have the oldest continuous cultural traditions in the world. This continuity of cultural traditions has endowed us with a rich and varied heritage in its myriad expressions – literature, music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture and architecture.

In a wider sense, history encompasses the development of human consciousness, a handing over or easy passage of ideas and beliefs from one generation to the other. As a remarkable feat of conservation of memory, the Indians, through the tradition of *smriti* and *sruti*, have passed on the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita and other sacred texts to the present day. The Vedas are believed to be divine revelations (*sruti*). The term *smriti* signifies an oral tradition wherein the teachers passed on to their students the texts which they themselves had received from their masters.

The *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-student tradition) was a significant institution that emerged out of these two traditions. Teaching was perceived to be a religious duty of the Brahmins and students were sent to live with a guru to learn not only the scriptures but also statecraft, music, warfare, science, and agriculture. In time, a student would attain the status of a guru and carry on the tradition of transmitting knowledge to his disciples. The institution of *guru-shishya parampara* covered the entire gamut of creative activity – religious discourse, history, dance, drama, poetry, painting, and sculpture. In this process, the learned mind renewed the sacred texts in the light of new social, religious, and economic realities as the guru was required to interpret the scriptures to find answers to emerging problems.

The institution of *guru-shishya parampara* declined over the years and now survives mainly in the realm of music and dance. New schools and institutions, seminar and discussion forums have emerged, replacing in a way the traditional modes of learning. The development of written manuscripts, followed by the technology of printing books and journals, and the storage of classics in computer software today has ensured that we do not lose anything of the past. However, the present system has its own inadequacy, as the renewal that occurred through dialogue in the old tradition is not a part of computer software. There is no denying that archives, libraries and computer technology play an important part in the conservation and interpretation of the past. But their role has been more in the realm of maintenance of texts rather than in their renewal. Renewal comes by using, by doing, by making the past an effective force in the present.

Conservation was part of thought, action and deed of the various communities who inhabited this land. Nature's gifts have been worshipped by our ancestors, sometimes with a sense of fear of the unknown, and at a later stage of evolution of man, as appreciation for the beauty and splendour of nature. To cite an example, early man realized that water was a life giving force, that he needed clean water for all his needs. This led to worship of water along with other natural elements such as the sun, the wind, the plants.

The Indian creative genius was not satisfied with a mere dictat that 'water must be kept clean'. He visualized the source in the snow-capped mountains, in the beautiful running streams which became mighty rivers as they flowed through the plains to reach the great oceans. He worshipped these rivers by giving them names – an identity. Poets wrote verses describing their beauty, sculptors and painters made icons of their forms, musicians and dancers sang their praises and showed, through movement and gesture, the life, as it were, of these human characters which were the rivers. Hence a physical necessity which was the river (water) became a cultural necessity. In conservation, we must realise that there is a thin line, if at all, which divides natural and cultural heritage.

Many art forms today are facing extinction given the growing insensitivity of the public to the aesthetic and cultural values expressed in these forms. There are numerous creative expressions that stem from religious beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. We need in-depth research and study to list out the people connected with the manifestations of the expression of these forms – experts and scholars, artisans, performers, jewellers, costume

and mask-makers and so on. For conserving heritage, an acknowledged methodology which has proved effective is the process of 'documentation'.

There is a crying need to document our creative expressions. This will not only be of use to future researchers but a good documentation team can facilitate the renewal and rejuvenation of the art form, as it works with the members of the community engaged in the creation of the art form, and encourages these people to achieve further excellence. Sophisticated advanced technology available today facilitates the documentation and dissemination of the arts. With new technology at hand, it is necessary to take an overall look at the present state of the arts and develop a methodology best suited for documenting the rich artistic heritage and living traditions of each region.

Due to the pluralistic nature and the diversity in the manifestations of Indian artistic expressions, there is a need to develop a comprehensive methodology for their documentation and conservation. It is important to understand the complex web of the forms and ideas manifest in the creative expressions. The cultural heritage forms a part of the life of the people of this land and each geo-physical and cultural region has contributed to its growth. To the spatial diversity is also added the time dimension. On this plane, which may be seen as a vertical frame, lies the dynamic process of continuity and change in each area.

While conserving what was beautiful in the cultural ethos and essential for life in nature, man, through several creative expressions, brought dignity, elegance and grace into his own life as well as in the lives of the members of the community in each region of this country. Today, the first concern is of maintaining and sustaining the

richness of India's cultural diversity. The second concern is with its historical development. With advancements in every field it is necessary to ensure that citizens share the benefits of progress and freedom. These two concerns, that is, development and conservation of our heritage, are not contrary or in opposition to one another. Modernization clashes with indigenous cultures and pluralistic society when it is artificially transplanted from a foreign mould onto an organic culture. The super-imposition of alien norms and systems will not take root in a living, growing society, which has its own unique character and essence. A diverse, pluralistic society must be allowed to develop and preserve its own culture.

**R**ural India has its rituals, songs, dances, creative forms related to seasons, which are in turn linked to the occupations of agricultural communities. The idea and philosophy inherent in the art form, the season or the geographical setting, the social context of a particular community are inextricably linked together. This integrated understanding of the living tradition requires that a suitable framework for documentation be developed to incorporate those aspects that give meaning to it and which are the source of the art. Yet another phenomena that deserves careful attention is the inter-relationship of the arts. Each art form is linked to religious, social, environmental and economic considerations.

In many instances, specially in the performing arts such as theatre, music, dance, drama, mime and acrobatics; literature, painting, mask making and stylized make-up combine to form a composite whole. There are paintings that interpret music and poetry, as also musical forms that narrate or recite literary works. There is a wealth of literature in India which

finds expression in all the performing arts and historical evidence of the evolution of the arts may be found in literature, sculpture and painting. This has primarily been responsible for the continuity of Indian cultural traditions such that, even today in 1998, one has episodes from the epics like the Mahabharata or the Ramayana being sung, danced, dramatized and communicated through many of the artistic expressions.

**H**owever, as we are about to complete another millennium, there are situations created by technical development and scientific advancement that may lead to the corrosion of the essence of aesthetic norms, creating disharmony in the structure of our lives. The easy way of life that allowed for contemplation and communication of the finest concepts, and the mental repose that allowed for participation in the creation of beauty, have been lost to a fast and gruelling pace of life. The story-teller using indigenous audio-visual expressions stemming from traditional values in the rural areas, sitting before his painted scroll subtly utilizing the language of gesture and music, enthraling audiences for long nights is today present in urban homes through television and video films. His entire cultural repertoire which lasted for several nights is now tailored to a mere 20 minute performance. How this has affected the core of our culture is an issue of concern for the conservationist.

Man created beautiful objects of utility, each designed with great love and care, striving for excellence in the preparation of each object. We call these objects of utility 'craft items' today and look at them from a consumer angle where they have to be mass produced for use as decorative pieces in urban homes or for export. But this does no good to the creator or

the article. Similarly, hand-written illustrated manuscripts on palm leaves affected the psyche in a way no printed book, however well produced, can. The joy of reading the text combined a cerebral activity with beauty in line and colour expressing the essence of the episode of the text. Each leaf was picked up and read and put back carefully as it was a work of art. Mass production does have its advantages but it does not add to the qualitative refinement of the soul.

The fact that the need for conservation/preservation did not arise till recently in India was due to the close relationship and relevance of the arts with the daily life of man. The impact of modernisation and development of industry has now created the need for conserving the natural and cultural heritage. A song that was sung for a particular occasion, viz., sowing or harvesting, is no longer relevant when tractors and other machines have taken over the work done by human beings. At best, the song will be recorded, documented and may later be taught to people unconnected with agriculture, but who enjoy it for purely aesthetic purposes. Or it may be forgotten and a whole body of musical traditions that are related to work and occupation or the life cycle may just disappear.

**I**n evolving a strategy for heritage awareness, there is a need for developing information packages for various target groups – the media, decision-makers, local authorities, the private sector and local communities. The conservationist must understand that a classification system of cultural property represents an approach, an ideology and an emphasis, with its in-built element of subjectivity. In India, there exists a wide-ranging practice of using western or English terminology for classification. This

practice has led to many difficulties. For example, the term 'folk' as used in English, and used by us as a qualifier in 'folk music', is imprecise and biased. In India, 80 per cent of the people live in villages and each rural community has its own musical forms related to occupation, religion and historical evolution.

**T**he musical forms of such communities may relate to the celebration of the harvest festival, change of season or related religious or social events. Folk music may not seem to have a codified grammar related to the discipline of sound and rhythm, or be sung to a specific *raga* or *tala* as in the classical forms of music. Yet, it does have a certain degree of abstraction and is of great symbolic value. It cannot be captioned as 'primitive', 'naïve' or 'folk'. The term folk in India cannot be used with any accuracy. Similar problems have occurred with words like 'classical' or 'ritual'.

India has a rich heritage of folklore which includes myths, legends and other stories that have been passed down from generation to generation through a variety of narrative forms available in different parts of the country. In the rural and tribal areas, members of the community are the custodians of this cultural heritage, which has survived through millennia. It has been enriched by successive generations who have added to its beauty and aesthetics, a special sensitivity which characterises the natural and cultural ethos of the community. The unity and diversity of this vast sub-continent can be seen through its folklore which expresses a thematic unity in myriad forms, influenced by the local and cultural traditions.

There are several other aspects that need to be sensitized to the core of our cultural beliefs and aesthetic values. One would like to highlight the

role of mass media, radio, television, books and magazines which influence and help build the value systems of a society. Various individuals and organisations have sacrificed a more comfortable way of life and opposed the building of dams if they fear uprooting of people and destruction of the eco-system. The Chipko movement was a unique and unheard of method used to stop the felling of trees. And this can be expected only in a land where the felling of one tree was preceded by the planting of 18 or more trees to the accompaniment of processions of dancers, musicians, singing verses addressed to the sky, the mother earth, the birds and so on, begging forgiveness for disrupting their lives. What a treasure-house of values expressed through literary, visual and the performing arts combining the need for conservation of the natural environment with creativity! This practice is still alive in many parts of the country.

**S**o many of our cultural traditions and art forms are on the brink of extinction. They may be lost in the hustle and bustle of mankind's preoccupation with material gains and an accelerated pace of life. Today, there are many cultural forms on which depends the quality of life of entire communities. They are our heritage, our past, on whose foundation our future shall stand tall and beautiful. If the foundation is wiped out then we shall be paupers, bankrupt in spirit and soul. It is, therefore, imperative that the government intervenes effectively in the task of heritage conservation and simultaneously enlists the participation of the community at large, and the private sector in particular, in this mammoth effort.

India's rich cultural heritage stands amply demonstrated in its various cultural sites and monuments.

They reflect a point of evolution that we had attained in ancient times. Some of these monuments and sites have been acclaimed the world over as of universal importance and are included in the World Heritage List of UNESCO. The monuments are, however, important not only architecturally but also from the point of view of history. It is, therefore, crucial to protect and conserve them.

**H**owever, this job is not an easy one. There are the pressures of development which often supplant the socio-cultural sensibilities of the people: the increased tourist traffic and the unreasonable demands made in the name of tourism; the rapid urbanization which has made most of our town planning efforts irrelevant and has, in many an instance, irreversibly altered the ambience of our cultural and historical sites; a population which is bursting at the seams, much of which lives in dire poverty in slums and ghettos; a tendency of some persons to exploit religious monuments for commercial ends; and so on. All these pressures, in their totality, threaten to irreparably damage our tangible heritage.

Both in the recorded history of civilization and in mythology the finest works of art and sculpture were always meant for places of worship. In fact, the dwellings of the Creator invariably occupied a higher status than those of kings, chieftains and the ruling elite. Most of our monuments, therefore, are intended as homage to the Creator. In the very nature of things a massive and/or uncontrolled entry of tourists to these places goes against the sacredness of these monuments. Yet, tourism is necessary both for the national economy and for sharing our knowledge, culture and values with the rest of the world. Also, tourists have often helped to focus

attention on the monuments in several developing countries, and India is no exception.

A matter of immediate concern is the state's vulnerability in matters of religion. It is unfortunate that the government has shied away from dealing severely with the offenders for fear that it might be dubbed as partisan, pro or anti one or the other religious group. Taking advantage of this fear and vulnerability of the system, unscrupulous and greedy people act with impunity for commercial gain. They have tried to occupy and politicise monuments which, over time, had ceased to be places of prayer and worship. Many such monuments have been taken over by the state for conservation and protection and declared as protected monuments. Such instances are many and are not limited to any one religious group.

**T**he prime question is how to protect this cultural property. In my view protection of cultural property has two inter-related aspects: the first includes historical sites, buildings, temples and other places of worship, works of art, and other such physical manifestations; the second relates to human skills, and attitudes which constitute the driving thrust in an individual towards the creation of works of glory and excellence. It must be appreciated that these skills and attitudes are not static, nor can cultural manifestations conform to being replicas of past buildings, temples, dance forms, or lyrics. Cultural manifestations are undergoing transformation in terms of revolution in communication, technology, environment, and the impact that the wider world is increasingly making on us. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is primarily concerned with the physical aspects of conservation of our cultural heritage, but it can perform this task efficiently

only when it is sensitive to the second aspect of preservation mentioned above.

In matters relating to the physical aspects of conservation, there is need to appreciate the role that the local people have played in maintaining heritage monuments and in viewing them as a part of their cultural personality since time immemorial. In fact, cultural heritage plays a critical role in fostering a sense of cultural personality, an essential condition for development and social stability.

**T**here is need to complete documentation of each site monument under the control of the ASI and simultaneously to move towards the preparation of a national register of historic sites and monuments. Towards this end, not only does the ongoing survey process need to be given a special thrust, it must also include aerial photography. The documentation must conform to internationally accepted standards.

Of the various activities entrusted to the ASI, the most important are those of conservation and preservation of archaeological heritage which includes monuments and sites, as well as loose antiquities in the form of sculptures and architectural members. While only 3500 monuments and sites are included in its protection list, the actual number may exceed 5000 since, in many cases, groups of monuments are listed singly or monuments located inside large forts covering an extensive area are included as a single monument.

This archaeological heritage comprising both secular as well as religious buildings is distributed over the entire country, in different climes – the arid to monsoonal, high altitude to coastal areas, mountainous to flat plains, and from forests to deserts. A large number of monuments are

located in extreme climatic conditions, like those in the freezing cold of Ladakh, the desert of Rajasthan, coastal areas, and areas with heavy rainfall. Coupled with this ecological and geological diversity is the variation from remote villages to densely populated areas including metropolises. Some of the sites have no basic amenities like electricity and water. Sometimes even water for conservation works has to be brought from a considerable distance, leave alone the building material. This heritage spans a long period of history – dating from about one hundred thousand years ago to just a few hundred years back.

This variety does not allow the application of any uniform method of conservation. The conservation of a monument implies preserving its setting. Wherever a traditional setting exists, it must be conserved. In other words, the original personality of a monument has to be preserved. No new constructions or modifications which would materially alter the relations of mass and colour should be allowed. A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness, and from the setting in which it is located. The moving of all or a part of a monument cannot be allowed except where the safeguarding of that monument demands it.

**C**onservation is a process to prolong the life of a monument. Each monument or archaeological site has its own unique problems which need to be addressed keeping in view only that particular monument or site. Thus, for example, the problems of conservation of the Leh palace or the brick temples at Bishnupur would be different altogether in comparison to the problems of conservation of the excavated remains at Lothal or the coastal temple at Mamallapuram. These problems are further com-



pounded by several other features such as the materials used in construction, varying degrees of disrepair or damage to the structure, difficulty with regard to availability of materials or even skilled artisans and, finally, the constant threat due to environmental degradation and the drastic change in the milieu from when the monuments were built.

**Q**ualitative information, coherently compiled, collated and disseminated, can become the single most powerful tool for the protection and preservation of India's rich and diverse cultural heritage. The responsibility for the preservation and protection of the 5,000 nationally protected monuments, however, must rest exclusively with the ASI. This approach suggests that INTACH and other voluntary organizations should cooperate with ASI on specific issues related to the site. This would include planning and development of appurtenant lands and, where applicable, the management of such monuments which because of historic reasons are unprotected but are an integral part of the complex. The voluntary organizations could also assist in infrastructure and community integration works.

While undertaking the conservation of a monument, several factors have to be taken into consideration, such as using the same material, preserving its original personality, the degree of intervention required, and so on. We may cite an example to illustrate this point. Given its location on the seashore, considerable damage had been caused to the stones used in the construction of the Dwarakadhish temple in Gujarat. It had, therefore, become necessary to replace the damaged stones by new ones and the work had to be carried out without interfering with the rites and rituals, or causing inconvenience to the pilgrims. For

replacing the badly weathered stones of the temple, a quarry with similar stone was located at Baradia, not far from the site. Eventually, the quarry ran out of stone and another quarry was located about 200 km from the monument. Transporting the large stones from the quarry to the temple site posed a problem, but was eventually solved with great difficulty. It may be mentioned that no heavy machinery, such as bulldozers or earth-movers, is used in the execution of conservation works at ancient sites.

There is an imperative requirement of creating and/or consolidating conditions for effective conservation of the cultural resources of the country. One has to move towards capacity building in institutions and empowerment of local conservation professionals. An emphasis on collaborative arrangements, particularly with educational institutions, environmental bodies and NGOs, and on training and awareness programmes is necessary. Institutions of culture at the national level – whether ASI, museums, archives or akademies – need to include heritage conservation as a priority area in their agenda.

**O**ne increasingly feels the need for collaboration between the ASI, the newly constituted National Culture Fund, and the national level voluntary organization INTACH. The National Culture Fund, launched in March 1997 at my initiative as Culture Secretary, has opened new and dynamic opportunities for embarking upon programmes involving participation of voluntary and government organizations in the national endeavour to protect and preserve India's cultural heritage. The Fund could become an important instrument to expand the areas of concern beyond the monuments protected by the ASI and the state departments of archaeology to

several historical sites and buildings facing decay for want of resources and professional care.

A unified approach is critical to avoid duplication of work or conflicting objectives, and may help assure possible donors as well as the public about the sincerity of action taken. It will also open areas of cooperation and participation by local community in the decision-making process as well as in implementation of programmes. Such an approach will help not merely in the utilization of scientific skills and technical knowledge, but combine them with local knowledge and traditions which form an integral part of India's intellectual legacy.

**T**he art objects of culturally rich developing countries were forcibly removed during the colonial era and today well-organized smuggling at international levels is rampant. In India, the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972, which came into force from 5 April 1976, seeks 'to prevent smuggling of, and fraudulent dealings in antiquities, and art treasures.' Under this Act, registration of antiquities as notified from time to time has become compulsory. Notwithstanding this legal framework, smuggling has assumed alarming proportions as art objects attract high prices in affluent western countries. The irony is that smugglers are sophisticated people with international networks, and they are often aided and abetted by auction houses.

A number of people in this country are still engaged in this illicit business. The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 provides for an offence a penalty extending upto three years of imprisonment. This is not a sufficient deterrent. The International Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of

Cultural Property, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its sixteenth session at Paris on 14 November 1970, is an important mechanism to prohibit and prevent illicit import, export and transfer of cultural properties. However, the real check to illicit international trade in antiques has necessarily to come at two levels – at the grassroots/institutional level, and through appropriate bilateral treaties between countries. The security of the antiques in the institutions where they may be located should be such as to pre-empt the possibility of any theft and, if there are appropriate bilateral agreements between countries, for the prompt return of the stolen property.

**T**he scale, diversity and historical depth of our heritage in terms of monuments, forms of art, music, dance and drama, as well manuscripts, require financial support of a massive nature, and an efficient, sensitive administrative infrastructure. Unfortunately, funding at such a level is not available, the administrative arrangements are inadequate, and there is an acute shortage of good culture managers in the country. State governments allocate meagre resources to cultural activities in their budgets. Even this amount faces drastic cuts whenever austerity measures are launched by the stage governments to mop up their deficits or to tide over their frequent financial crises.

The position in the Government of India too is not particularly attractive. The culture sector has not received adequate financial support under the five year plans. While the culture sector's allocation in respect of the first plan is not separately available, the expenditure was only Rs 3 crore, 7 crore, 12 crore, 28 crore, 115 crore, 451 crore and Rs 800 crore respectively under the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th

7th and 8th five year plans. Although the standing committee of Parliament had recommended an allocation of one per cent of GDP on culture, the allocation of funds over the 8th plan – which was much more liberal than previous plans – has only been to the tune of 0.19 per cent of the total plan outlay of the Government of India. Notwithstanding the increasing importance of culture, both as a factor in development and in strengthening the country's special status in the world, one does not expect the 9th five year plan allocation to rise significantly. This is both due to financial constraints and a well-established practice in the Planning Commission to recommend marginal increases, except on programmes which come under political or security compulsions.

**T**he schemes to provide grant-in-aid to voluntary organisations of repute for the conservation and preservation of monuments, for documenting the performing and visual arts, for setting up museums at the district level, for establishing new regional centres of national academies, the National School of Drama, the zonal cultural centres, the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, the state academies, for new libraries – all deserve substantial state support. Cultural education through the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, as also through schools in general, requires special attention. In view of the magnitude of financial requirements, there is a need to look for external support. In this context, the National Cultural Fund becomes particularly relevant.

There is a need to strengthen the managerial capabilities of various organisations under the Department of Culture, such as the ASI, the National Archives, the National Research Laboratory for the Conservation of

Cultural Property, the Anthropological Survey of India, and the various library systems. The task of servicing heritage sites, archival materials, museums and art centres, libraries, and anthropological research have all suffered for want of organized services to man the cultural institutions.

As Culture Secretary, I had proposed to the Fifth Pay Commission the constitution of an Indian Archaeological Service, an Indian Anthropological Service and an Indian Library Service. The creation of these service structures could go a long way in boosting the morale of employees in these organizations, improving their career prospects, and serving the wider cause of augmenting efficiency in these fields of cultural pursuit. To attract talent from outside, a provision should be made for lateral entry and eventual absorption into these services, in addition to the regular annual recruitment of Grade 'A' culture managers through the Union Public Service Commission from among the young and bright graduates.

**T**he cultural manifestations of art and all other creative activities which improve the quality of life of man is what forms our heritage. Today, there is a great need for 'management' of culture in India, which is a developing country in the economic sense but highly developed in the cultural sense. We have to maintain our position in the global arena where we are looked up to by other nations as a country with a continuous cultural tradition over 5000 years.

Democracy and ecology are integral part of the Indian philosophy and culture. India has a tradition of democracy which can be traced to the small principedom of Vaishali in Buddha's time. Despite vicissitudes, it has survived and has become more vibrant during the last 50 years. Dur-

ing these five decades a new leadership has emerged comprising, happily, of many women at the grassroots level.

Ecology was a concern in the Vedas and Upanishads. I am not sure if the authors of the Vedas had a map of globe before them. Certainly, they did not have space satellites but they seem to have delved into those areas of cosmos and thought that nature is one for the whole world. It is true that modern democracy and ecology are post-Second World War concepts, but they will endure because the concern for ecology, the concern for human rights and government by consent of the people are basic concerns. At the same time, the role and responsibility of women as preservers and transmitters of tradition, cultural mores and all that comprises heritage will become more pronounced.

India's contribution to world culture, its rich bio-diversity and great plurality have generated awe, fascination and respect. In 1915, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy wrote: 'Each race contributes something essential to the world's civilization in the course of its own self expression... the essential contribution of India, is simply her Indianness; her great humiliation would be to substitute or to have substituted for this own character (*śvabhava*) a cosmopolitan veneer, for then indeed she must come before the world empty-handed.'

I have often wondered that modern India would be required to conserve in the new millennium many of the recent acquisitions, particularly those of the second half of the 20th century—computers, telephones, satellites, pop music, films, new literary trends, even nuclear weapons. But I am convinced that the challenge to conserve our cultural heritage would be more serious and urgent than any other and ever before.

# Towards an Indian charter

A. G. KRISHNA MENON

WHAT authenticity means to a society determines how it deals with the artifacts of its cultural heritage. Even though the dictionary provides a precise meaning of the word, in practice it varies from culture to culture and changes with time. It also varies depending upon whether one is thinking of ruins and monuments, or about buildings in use. The different meanings of authenticity have provided sufficient grist for several arguments, seminars and scholarly studies—particularly when conservation practices in previously marginalised local cultures became more widely known.

In India, for example, as the traditional building wisdom of the *sompuras* of Gujarat, the *asharis* of Kerala and *sthapatis* of Tamil Nadu becomes more widely known to the western-educated conservation community, many have begun to question the principles of their own practice.

While different cultures have different ways of dealing with their heritage, a widely-held definition of authenticity advocates the practice of non-intervention in the preservation of cultural artifacts. In fact, we can determine the difference between cultures on the basis of the degree of intervention that each culture thinks is necessary to protect its past. Some prefer minimum intervention, while others reconstruct substantial parts of buildings.

In India, the British colonial government introduced and established the principle of minimum intervention. This continues to be the guiding principle in the (official) practice of

conservation, though indigenous traditions contest this principle. However, actual intervention is determined both by the physical condition of the artifacts and the importance one places on the existing fabric. Even in England we witness an elasticity of definitions, from the extreme notion of non-intervention advocated by John Ruskin to an inevitably modified and sensible practice that nevertheless accepts the philosophical underpinnings of Ruskin's writings.

In the West, by 1931, the Athenes Charter even recommended the judicious use of modern materials, especially reinforced cement concrete, and thereby confirmed the practice that existed in several European countries at the time. Therefore, we can reasonably infer that before the Second World War, the conception of authenticity – and therefore the response of the conservation architect – varied and was generally mediated as much through practical necessities as through the ideological stance adopted by the profession in each society: there was no universal, or 'correct' definition to guide practice.

The extent of the destruction caused by the Second World War further eroded the boundaries between philosophical imperatives and practical necessities in Europe. It led to extreme decisions, such as the rebuilding of Rotterdam as a new city on the one hand, and the rebuilding of Warsaw's old town as a copy, as accurately as possible, of the destroyed original on the other. In each case, what was authentic about the destroyed city was perceived differently: one perceived it as lost and irretrievable; the other recognized the loss, but felt that its memory could be recreated for future generations.

I would like to clarify here, to those familiar with the passionate

debate between *scientific* and *stylistic* restoration a century ago, that I do not propose to go over familiar terrain. I will attempt instead to focus on the particular circumstances and the unique cultural conditions which sustain the possibilities of recreating authentic cultural artifacts in our society.

My position may appear to be close to the arguments employed by the advocates of *stylistic* restoration. I realize that considerable damage was wrought on valuable and irreplaceable buildings as a result of stylistic restoration at that time, so I will begin by clarifying my position. I agree that the replication of the 'old' in Warsaw is not, as Ruskin puts it, the 'real thing', that in building it anew it had indeed become something else, a copy, a counterfeit, and so had lost its authenticity in the literal sense of the word. Who can disagree with the forceful condemnation of replications by Ruskin?<sup>1</sup>

While I do not take issue with Ruskin, I would nevertheless distinguish between the literal and the broader definitions of authenticity and the meaning such broader definitions have in the lives of the people who relate to the cultural artifact. The reconstructed town of old Warsaw is certainly a 'lie' as Ruskin would have put it, but the positive emotions it evoked in its reconstruction, and continues to evoke in subsequent generations in that society, are equally palpable and real, and provide enough justification to view the exercise in a different light. Thus, given the circumstances, a 'lie' can have redemptive qualifications in the field of conservation, even if it is untenable on historical or philosophic grounds.

1. John Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1849.

To understand the nature of such redemptive qualifications, it may be instructive to examine Alois Riegl's definition of *age-value* to interpret works of the past. Though Riegl is quintessentially 'modern' and 'European' in his sensibility, he has drawn an useful distinction between the modern and pre-modern view of age-value. He defines age-value as that which is 'rooted purely in its value as memory... (which) springs from our appreciation of the time which has elapsed since (the work) was made and which has burdened it with traces of age... (The) emotional effect depends on neither scholarly knowledge nor historical education.'

To clarify, he juxtaposes this quality with 'newness' which he says must recall '...earlier works as little as possible.' To Riegl, who was attempting to define the characteristics of modernism during the early part of this century in Vienna, the two ideas were complementary and dependent on each other.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear to us today that the pairing of the two terms by Riegl belongs to a specifically modern sensibility, as are the views of Ruskin, William Morris, *et al.*, who defined the English conservation sensibility. It is this sensibility that permeates the modern meaning of 'authenticity' in UK, Europe and the various charters which the European nations promulgated as 'universal' beliefs. This sensibility was passed on to us by the colonial government, which the formal/modern profession of conservation accepted as gospel. We punctiliously refer to this sensibility to authenticate conservation practice in India in order to 'catch up with the West'.

2. For a discussion on this subject, see Alan Colquhoun, *Modernity and the Classical Tradition, Architectural Essays 1980-1987*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1991, pp. 213-221.

The past, according to Riegl, is valued in the European cultures for its 'pastness', a concept which would be difficult to translate in the Indian context. It is based on the concept of the linearity of time – the 'arrow of time'. To the modern Indian architect, for example, the past is viewed differently, with a contemporary stamp as it were. The (architectural) past provides models for the development of a contemporary Indian architecture because the past represents *timeless* architectural values and is distinct from the term 'pastness'. It represents a perception of history and the past which cannot be attributed to the arrow of time, and therefore, in cultural terms, the perception of elements of the past as timeless represents a value different to the one that ascribes the quality of pastness to it.

**R**iegl's concept of age-value also does not take into account another distinctive characteristic of the Indian heritage: the organic relationship between monuments and the societies that produced them, though he does accept that in pre-modern societies (or in Europe before 1800) such a relationship may have existed. Modern Europe has lost or discarded this organic relationship in the process of modernisation. Hence it is able to view its past with an emotional distance that pre-modern societies would find difficult.

As a modernising society – pre-modern in sociological terms – our society does not (could not, according to Riegl) value the past for its pastness. Both modern and traditional architects in India, in fact, explore/examine/excavate the past in order to develop a 'normative' (in response to the consequences of modernization) contemporary architecture which would perhaps display 'timeless architectural values'. There is an

organic relation between the past and present not available in Riegl's definition of pastness or age-value. The *sompuras*, the *asharis* and the *sthapatis* are products of and subscribe to this organic relationship between the past and its contemporary meaning to the people to whom it belongs.

**I**n the Indian context, anyone working on the historic cores of cities invariably takes into account the existence of the organic relationship between monuments and the societies that produced them. Because of this relationship, heritage in India has a normative contemporary relevance, a perspective which is different from the European (Riegl's) definition of age-value. The difference between the European and Indian perspectives on the past is also reflected in the difference between the official/legal and the traditional perceptions of the people and the craftsmen within India. Each holds different views on what constitutes authenticity in the architectural heritage, and Riegl provides the key to understanding the differences. This dichotomy is becoming increasingly apparent in seminars and practice in the field, and must be addressed if we are to evolve a more appropriate conservation practice in India.

The formal practice of conservation in India is guided by attitudes nurtured over the past century, at least since the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1862. It was re-organised and given legal status by Lord Curzon in 1904 and it matured under the direction of eminent British archaeologists such as John Marshall (1902-1928) and Mortimer Wheeler (1944-48) who headed the organization. Marshall wrote the Conservation Manual in 1923 which remains the basic text guiding conservation work in India. This manual was updated for the

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) in 1989 by another eminent British conservation authority, Bernard Feilden.<sup>3</sup>

Wheeler, in his four eventful years in India, ushered in the current phase of archaeology and systematic excavation, and trained a new generation of Indian archaeologists who maintain the protected monuments in the spirit he inculcated in them. This alignment with British practice has been further reinforced during the last ten years through the agency of the Charles Wallace Trust Scholarship Fund to train Indian conservationists at the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York, UK. The economic problems facing British universities has also meant that more British institutions are actively looking for opportunities to encourage Indian students to study in the UK. Undoubtedly, this will reinforce the trend of alignment with British practice. In addition to the 'aligned' staff of ASI, there are now over 30 'York scholars' in India who propagate a very British perspective on conservation.

**T**oday the ASI protects over 5000 monuments of national importance, while its counterparts in the various states look after another 4000 monuments. The small number of protected monuments in an archaeologically rich country like India reveals the astonishingly limited nature of ASI's perception of the cultural heritage which it is charged to protect. This can only partially be explained by the inadequate financial resources at its command because, I suggest, it is the ideological roots of the profession in India that is the problem.

3. Bernard M. Feilden, *Guidelines for Conservation: A Technical Manual*. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, New Delhi, 1989.

First, the protection of only 9000 monuments in a country of the size and antiquity of India obviously covers only a fraction of the extant material. One gets an idea of the scale of inadequacy of these numbers when one realises that in Britain there are 30,000 Grade-I monuments receiving positive attention in one form or another out of 500,000 which are listed. Since the British colonial government established the criteria for the selection of buildings to be protected – which the ASI continues to follow – one can only speculate if this selectivity in the protection of the monuments in India did not perhaps reflect the sheer exasperation of the colonial mind when confronted by the problem of managing a prolific but alien culture. Entire categories of the building heritage, though assiduously protected in Britain, were left out of the purview of conservation in India. What were defined as authentic examples of the cultural heritage in India precluded everything but the most exemplary buildings and archaeological sites.

That the post-independence ASI continues to follow such a limited and restrictive definition of authenticity is indeed strange and worth examining. The ASI currently operates under The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958, which is in fact only a slightly revised version of Lord Curzon's pioneering initiative, The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904. Thus, while in Britain the objectives of conservation, and policies to put them into effect, have evolved over the years (witness the changes in the town planning legislation to accommodate the imperatives historic towns and precincts),<sup>4</sup> laws and practice of conservation in India have ossified into a

mindset established in 1904. Clearly, there is a strong case to re-examine conservation principles and broaden the definition of what constitutes authenticity in the field of architectural heritage. Any such exercise should accommodate the indigenous traditions of conservation and address the problem of protecting the less than exemplary monuments which are currently outside the purview of ASI.

Second, the focus on monuments alone is inadequate and provides a misleading definition of cultural heritage. A good example of looking beyond monuments is the Burra Charter adopted by the Australian ICOMOS. The Burra Charter defines *place* as a 'site, area, building or other work, group of buildings or other works together with pertinent contents and surroundings,' and *conservation* to mean 'all the processes of looking after a *place* so as to retain its *cultural significance*' and in addition to regular *maintenance* the work of conservation may, 'according to circumstance, include *preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation* and will be commonly a combination of more than one of these.'

The charter, however, excludes the practice of either recreation or conjectural reconstruction, but more on that later. For the present it is only necessary to recognize the existence of broader perceptions of what is authentic about the past than those so assiduously cultivated by the ASI.<sup>5</sup>

Third, the situation reveals a poor appreciation of the conservation movement among intellectuals, administrators, technicians on the one hand and the people at large on the

other.<sup>6</sup> We in India need to evolve our own philosophical approach which should take into account both the meaning of authenticity inherited from our exposure to the West and the indigenous traditions which include the role of craftsmen who constitute the *living* heritage in our contemporary society.

It is the availability of craftsmen – *authentic* by any definition – in the present time in our society which defines the specificity of our contemporary cultural condition and should distinguish conservation practices in India from the inherited European terms of reference. The fields of dance and music in India have nurtured the continuity of these traditions and have consequently flourished in our times: likewise we need to promote and establish the continuity of the craft tradition of building in our contemporary society before it is lost to future generations. To pass on to the next generation what we possess in ours is the fundamental premise of conservation. This is unlikely to happen unless we re-examine our current conservation precepts.

This examination should take into account the *de facto* changes that are taking place in the conservation movement, even though the *de jure* situation remains fossilised in colonial imperatives and practices. A major catalyst for change was the

among other things. (ii) The *Florence Charter* of 1987 on historic gardens and landscapes. (iii) The *Washington Charter* of 1987 on historic areas and towns filling in an important gap in the Venice charter. (iv) The *Lausanne Charter* of 1990 for archaeological heritage.

India is a signatory to these charters as a member of UNESCO, but there is no evidence of the government taking any follow-up action in consequence of accepting these charters in its working methods.

6. Bernard M. Feilden, 'Is Conservation of Cultural Heritage Relevant to South Asia?' *The Journal of South Asian Studies* 9, 1993.

5. The International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has promulgated four charters: (i) The *Venice Charter* of 1964/66 which emphasises the need for conserving authenticity and thorough documentation

4. For a synoptic review see the HMSO booklet on Planning, 1992.

establishment of INTACH in 1984. Its work in the area of architectural heritage attempted to bridge the gap between the work of the ASI on the one hand, and the town planning departments of the various state governments on the other. Both agencies deal with the architectural heritage, but seldom with a common purpose: INTACH attempted to define the common purpose.

Initially, INTACH adopted the ideology of international orthodoxy. This was inevitable considering that the direction of its technical work was firmly in the Marshall/Wheeler tradition<sup>7</sup> and its own *Guidelines for Conservation* was written by the eminent British conservation architect, Bernard Feilden<sup>8</sup>. As it turned out, these vestiges of international conservation orthodoxy were not critical in the works initiated by INTACH, because most of the conservation work was carried out by professional architects who had little previous experience in the field and thus were often able to see afresh the realities they confronted in their projects.<sup>9</sup>

These realities began to define the specificities of the Indian context and is the source of the arguments I am constructing in this paper. India has perhaps the oldest continuous civilization and the evidence of its past

7. The technical direction was provided by B.K. Thapar who was a student of Mortimer Wheeler and a former Director General of the ASI. It is interesting to note that B.K. Thapar admitted during the course of many discussions that his experience at INTACH had altered his earlier perspective and generously encouraged my apostasy.

8. Even Bernard Feilden recognized the particularities of the Indian circumstance and hoped that in time, India would define its own conservation philosophy.

9. The practice of employing architects to undertake INTACH's conservation work revealed an interesting lacuna in the ASI's work. Archaeologists working for the ASI have no formal architectural training; they are typically civil engineers and historians. Though

evokes not only wonder, but empathy and emotional involvement as well. It is also a diverse culture of several religious, historical antecedents and aspirations, all coexisting in discrete geographical regions: what one policy of conserving the age-value of the architectural heritage can suffice to deal with such diversity? Clearly, a common attitude and objectivity are difficult to achieve in the pursuit of conservation in India.

The work of the ASI requires the isolation of buildings from the use for which they were intended for their protection. While this may be valid for buildings of the highest importance, it cannot be advocated for the majority of the extant (and non-protected) buildings and monuments of cultural value, particularly examples of vernacular architecture. Such buildings continue to be in use, and indeed derive meaning from such use.<sup>10</sup>

What is the meaning of authenticity to the people who are using the architectural heritage? Is it the same as the one held by archaeologists, historians and other arbiters of cultural heritage? This question was brought home to me while I was working on an exquisite ensemble of old wooden houses belonging to the Bohra community in Ujjain. In our survey we had noted with dismay the process of attrition beginning to take hold in this neighbourhood; these wooden houses were being replaced with non-descript

familiar with architectural history and traditional building practices, they have little understanding of architectural methods and devices. The situation in Britain, it must be noted, is different, and the specially trained architect is an important member of the conservation team, often in a pivotal decision-making capacity.

10. The ASI faced an interesting problem in restoring and consolidating the Jagannath Temple in Puri. The manner in which it negotiated the particular problem of dealing with this important religious building in daily use would make an interesting case study.

'modern' houses. We recognized the need to stem the tide and worked out a complex strategy for *in-situ* upgradation, economic incentives and subsidies and professional assistance.

The residents, however, were not persuaded to adopt our proposal because, as they pragmatically pointed out, the antique dealers in Bombay who cannibalized the building into smaller artifacts were willing to offer a substantial fortune – obviously far more attractive than our modest package – for their house. All things considered, they preferred to accept the windfall. Our subsequent proposal, that the government should acquire one or two buildings as models for posterity, too did not materialise because such 'cultural' expenses were placed low in their priority, and their meager budget addressed the larger concern to provide minimum essential services.

In what manner could we address the issue of authenticity and the conservation of the Bohra houses in Ujjain? Of course, one could shrug off the question and concentrate on preserving just the 9000 odd 'official' monuments listed by the government. Such indifference would, however, inevitably lead to the loss of a large part of our heritage through attrition. Can we consider the unthinkable – a strategy to reuse the cannibalised Bohra house? Many consider cannibalising a historic artifact objectionable in the deepest sense, but turn a blind eye to the process of attrition due to market forces. The lesson to be learnt from this experience is that future policies need to be flexible and even consider the protection of cannibalised architectural elements as a possible conservation option. We have to face the problem head-on and choose strategies to suit the circumstance.

Any strategy to conserve the architectural heritage in the present circumstance will have to contend with the imperatives of development and social change.<sup>11</sup> The problem with the various international charters is that they presume the availability of a *preservation option* while dealing with architectural heritage in India. The stark reality in most cases is that the preservation option is irrelevant to the future aspirations of the people to whom the heritage belongs. The concern for preserving the 'golden stain of time' would appear to be a cruel irony to those desperately seeking change and the basic necessities of life.

Let us, therefore, look at *change* as a strategic option to achieve the objectives of architectural conservation. But what kind of change? If we must consider change as an option to *conserve* the architectural heritage, we come up against Riegl's pairing of newness and age-value in his definition of architectural heritage. We must recall that Riegl was attempting to define 'modernism', and in the process clarified the European meaning of authenticity and consequently the rationale for conservation in Europe, which we have come to accept as universal—at least, officially—in practice.

This, as I have tried to show, is at odds with the cultural stance of the people and the ground realities in India. I, therefore, believe that in India age-value must have a contemporary stamp and not be distinct from newness as suggested by Riegl. To achieve this I suggest that we must enlist the various crafts and traditions of the traditional craftsmen to achieve this objective. The 'new' that they build, reconstruct or add onto, must have the stamp of the authentic tradi-

tion the communities of craftsman have nurtured through generations.

I have discussed earlier the need to re-prioritise the objective of conservation in India by focusing on what is *becoming* of our architectural heritage rather than on *what it was*.<sup>12</sup> That was nearly nine years ago. In the meantime I have tested my ideas at seminars and in the field. I cannot claim to have put my ideas across as effectively as I would have wanted to, and it is possible that much of the resistance I have faced could be on that account. Nevertheless, the message I carry away from those dialogues is this: 'We broadly agree with your argument, but....'

The 'but' is seldom cogently explained except in terms of not seeing any problem with the prevailing ideology or practice of conservation as advocated by the international charters. By and large, the people I spoke to did not wish to be confused with the facts of our cultural circumstances, but preferred, instead, to operate within the certainties of the internationally validated *status quo*. Even INTACH, which pioneered so much work in the past, and whom I have attempted to persuade to examine the necessity for an Indian charter for conservation, remains strangely reluctant. Once again, I come away with the message I have received elsewhere: '...it is difficult enough trying to keep the ideological boat on an even keel under the present circumstances, don't try and rock it by asking provocative questions to which we have no answers.'

The Indian charter for conservation, when formulated, will inevitably have to address these provocative questions. To begin with it will have

to distinguish between the exemplary monuments which are currently accorded legal protection and the other, less-than-exemplary monuments and buildings or groups of buildings which abound in our country. The list of exemplary monuments should, of course, be increased<sup>13</sup> and they too should be protected by the ASI. They should follow the standards and practices enunciated in the international charters. The work on the second category of unprotected buildings should, however, follow new imperatives to be set out in an Indian charter of conservation and this will have to allow change, consider conjectural additions and alterations, accept replacement and even allow new buildings using traditional craftsmen, materials and techniques. The work of traditional craftsmen will have to be encouraged, promoted and valued as constituting an authentic tradition to be conserved for future generations. They could even offer a viable alternative to contemporary building systems.

To encourage — and thereby conserve — the practice of the traditional mason or sculptor raises the question of which form of authenticity this practice would seek to conserve: the historic building or the historic *way* of building. The persistence of the historic way of building in India is a precious characteristic of cultural continuity in our contemporary society. We need to recognize its value and not continue to privilege the historic building over the historic ways of building in our conservation policies. This will be the task of an Indian charter of conservation.

11. A.G.K. Menon. *Cultural Identity and Urban Development*. INTACH, New Delhi, 1989.

12. A.G.K. Menon. 'Conservation in India, A Search for Directions', *Architecture+Design*, November-December 1989, pp. 22-27.

13. A study undertaken to conserve the old city of Bhubaneswar (*Ekamra Kshetra*) by INTACH in 1989 identified 48 additional Grade I monuments and 117 Grade II and Grade III monuments which were not protected by either the state or central agencies.



# A legal approach

VRINDA GROVER

ON *Baisakhi* this year, I went to Amritsar for a family reunion. Memories were relived and old haunts visited but on Lawrence Road, where the family had lived since Partition, *Ghadiwalli Kothi* (mansion with a clock) had vanished. Vanished without a trace. Even an old rickshaw puller rued the kothi's absence. 'It always gave the correct time,' he said. References, signs, memories – both personal and historical – these are what bind people to their city. Bonds that are shared by its inhabitants.

Imagine returning to Delhi after 10 years to find that the ruins of a dam built during the reign of Mohammad bin Tughlaq near your house has been replaced by a school of vocational studies, or an old city wall demolished to facilitate the flow of traffic. Major historical structures like the Red Fort, Qutab Minar or the Humayun's Tomb would, of course, remain but several smaller 'insignificant' structures are more likely to disappear, just like the Ghadiwalli Kothi in Amritsar. Such a possibility is real for Delhi and several other Indian cities, with the exception of Mumbai and Hyderabad.

There is today an increasing awareness about the monumental heritage of India and concern for its preservation is frequently voiced in the media. The monuments of national or regional importance are generally protected by statutes, viz. The Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act,

1958, and corresponding state legislations. The mandate of the Archaeological Survey of India and the state archaeology departments is to protect and maintain these monuments. Undoubtedly, those entrusted with this task need to do much more.

What is, however, of deep concern is the fate of the thousands of unprotected buildings, towers, mosques, shrines, bungalows, *havelis*, churches and clock towers, ponds, rock formations, even old trees, which fall outside the purview of any such statute. There is no legal regime for the protection of these cultural and natural properties. There is an urgent need to intervene in such situations since it is this heritage that we are rapidly losing. It is these buildings and precincts, artifacts and ecological features, which give each city its distinct character and identity.

Heritage regulations preserve not only structures but also relationships between people and their city. No matter for how long you are away from Mumbai, on your return you will find intact the villas of the 19th century. The dockyards, fountains, churches, mansions, schools and college buildings would still be standing in the nerve centre of India's business capital. Similarly, Hyderabad is unlikely to lose its historic character and the mosques, forts, towers, temples, gardens and rocks will make a transition into the next century. However, the same optimism cannot be expressed for the buildings and structures of India's capital, Delhi.

Mumbai has taken the lead in preserving its unique character and culture embodied in its built heritage. In February 1991, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, the relevant planning authority, gazetted the heritage regulations for inviting public objections and suggestions as Development Control Regulation No. 67. These supplement the development control regulations under the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966. In April 1995, these were sanctioned by the government of Maharashtra. A few days later, a list of heritage buildings and precincts was issued. The regulations thus framed and in force since February 1991, now control all development, redevelopment, repairs and usage of all structures enumerated in the list.

**T**hese heritage regulations were introduced to preserve Mumbai's urban fabric in the face of rapid economic changes and a rising demographic graph. Taking cue from Mumbai, the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority, in December 1995, issued regulations for the conservation of heritage buildings and precincts (rocks) in Hyderabad city. These regulations are in addition to the existing Hyderabad Urban Development Authority Zoning Regulation 1981, under Section 59 of the Andhra Pradesh Urban Areas (Development) Act 1975. In February 1997, a list of 150 heritage building and 9 heritage precincts (rock formations) was published for public notice.

Over three years ago, in April 1995, the Ministry of Environment and Forests prepared draft regulations for the conservation of heritage buildings, heritage precincts and natural features within municipal areas or other legally designated urban areas. A copy of these comprehensive draft

regulations was sent by the Government of India to the chief secretary of every state and union territory. Unfortunately, it failed to evoke much response from the concerned governments.

**W**hat is it that these heritage regulations seek to protect for posterity? Within the purview of these heritage regulations would fall such buildings, artifacts, structure, areas and precincts which have historical, aesthetic, architectural and cultural significance, and those natural features which have environmental significance. A list of such heritage properties is prepared by the planning authority and confirmed after considering the suggestions and objections of the public. These regulations would thereafter control all development, redevelopment or engineering operations or additions, alterations, repairs, renovation or demolition of the listed building or listed precincts or listed natural features.

The decision-making power under the regulations vests in the municipal commissioner, who in turn would act in consultation with and on the advice of the Heritage Conservation Committee. The scheme of heritage regulations envisages active citizens' participation – structural engineers, conservation architects, city historians, environmentalists, eminent citizens, nominees of the Ministry of Environment and Forests and officers of the state government and municipal corporation.

This heritage conservation committee is expected to play a pivotal role in enforcing the regulations and advise the municipal commissioner in all cases, as also prepare a supplementary list of buildings, precincts or natural features to which the operation of these regulations would extend. This committee would also offer expertise in conservation and

design elements and in the maintenance of the listed structures.

The heritage conservation committee, using the yardstick of significance, merit and excellence of the structure would grade all heritage buildings and precincts enumerated in the list. Listing of a building would not obstruct a change of ownership or usage provided such a usage is in harmony with its cultural value. The grading of buildings would provide the basic guidelines for grants and development permissions.

**H**eritage Grade I comprises building and precincts of national or historic importance, embodying excellence in architectural style, design, technology and material usage. These are prime landmarks of the city. In Grade I structures no external or internal change is permitted. Heritage Grade II (A&B) would comprise of buildings and precincts of regional or local importance possessing special architectural or aesthetic merit or cultural or historical significance, though of a scale lower than Grade I. These are the local landmarks of a city. Such structures deserve intelligent conservation. Under Grade II(A) internal changes and adaptive reuse and external change would be allowed so long as the special features of the property is retained. Under Grade II(B), in addition to the above, extension of the building may also be allowed so long as it does not detract from the heritage value of the building.

Heritage Grade III comprises building and precincts of importance to townscape. They are of architectural, aesthetic archaeological significance. They represent the distinctive character or lifestyle of a particular community or region. Structures under this grade deserve intelligent conservation and protection of unique features. For such buildings external

and internal changes, as well as adaptive reuse would by and large be allowed, and an extension of the same plot would also be permitted. All these development permissions would be granted by the municipal commissioner on the advice of the heritage conservation committee.

For these regulations to be effective it is necessary that urban development authorities, while planning cities and towns, display sensitivity to the heritage value of buildings and areas dotting the city. The draft heritage regulations of the Ministry of Environment and Forests require the master plan to be so prepared that no development activity which detracts or adversely affects any listed building, precinct or natural feature is allowed. In any construction of new roads or road widening works, care must be taken that listed structures are not affected. Similarly, all development within the heritage precinct should be in accordance with the special regulations framed for each listed precinct.

**T**hese heritage regulations require that while planning for development the concerned authority should accord primacy to preserving the heritage character of the city. Even while installing hoardings and signboards, it should be ensured that the skyline of heritage buildings is maintained and not overshadowed. If our urban heritage is to be saved, planning and urban development authorities must reorient themselves and hold a serious dialogue with heritage conservationists. A fresh approach must be adopted and development and heritage conservation must no longer be viewed as antithetical to each other.

It would be futile to stress the need for conservation and preservation of properties located in the metropolitan and other major cities, where

land prices have spiraled in the last decade, unless these heritage regulations are backed by sound fiscal policies. To make heritage regulations vibrant and viable, powerful incentives have been offered. It is critical for preservation that the owner of a heritage property views his building as an asset rather than a millstone round his neck.

**O**ne of the incentives provided is in the form of a transferable development right to the owner of a listed property if he is deprived of any unconsumed floor space index on account of the heritage regulation. A development right certificate is issued to the owner to enable him to utilize the development potential in another plot of land. The holder of a development rights certificate may transfer it to another person. This development certificate, issued by the municipal commissioner, operates as a negotiable instrument.

For instance, in Mumbai, while the transferable development right for normal development plan reservation cannot be utilized in the island city of Mumbai, heritage transferable development right is allowed to be utilized in the same ward from which it originates, even within the island city. Another powerful incentive offered by the regulations is to allow the owner of a heritage building to use a portion of his building for commercial office space. The heritage conservation committee would also permit adaptive reuse of heritage property, which would enhance both the commercial and heritage value of the property.

On the advice of the heritage conservation committee, the municipal commissioner may also disburse funds for repair and maintenance to owners of listed properties from the restoration fund. Despite astronomical property prices and a powerful

builders lobby, this experiment has already proved highly successful in Mumbai. The Mumbai experience has been most encouraging and this scheme enjoys the support of its citizens.

According to most analysts, by the turn of the millennium, tourism is slated to be a major revenue generating industry. There is speculation that if India takes the right steps to promote tourism, the chronic problems of unemployment and paucity of foreign exchange could to some extent be resolved. While the ancient pluralistic civilization and spiritual mysticism of India continues to attract tourists, this must be coupled by sincere and rigorous efforts to provide visitor-friendly environs in cities such as Delhi which is an important destination on the tourist map. I remember my grandfather often quoting the lines of a famous poet, '*kaun jaey Zauk par Dilli ki galiyan chod ke.*' Obviously there was a charm, magic and nostalgia about Delhi that he often referred to. Heritage regulations are a unique mechanism to recapture some of that magic.

**T**he Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), committed to its charter of preservation and conservation of the cultural and natural heritage of India, has actively campaigned for the introduction of heritage regulations drafted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. A dialogue in this respect has been initiated with the concerned authorities in Delhi, Chennai, Cochin and Thiruvananthapuram. Heritage regulations cannot be the exclusive concern of conservation organizations. If the remnants of peoples' aspirations, struggles and achievements are to be saved, many others must join hands.

A city that seeks to forget its past and erase its present is doomed to wander forever in search of its soul.

# Institutional efforts

M VELAYUDHAN NAIR

LITTLE is known about the status of conservation of cultural property in pre-British India. From available records it has been established that the earliest efforts started in the latter half of the 19th century and were limited to the structural repair of monuments. These efforts by the then rulers utilised available skills, and often ignored the principles of retaining the historical or archaeological value of the site. With the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1861, modern aims and methods of conservation came into existence. This in turn led to the formulation of a conservation policy by the government.

Chemical conservation in India can be traced back to the attempts by Griffiths to apply varnish on the wall paintings of Ajanta in 1872. This was done to protect the paintings from damp and also to brighten them. Unfortunately, Griffiths was not a trained conservator and the cultural wealth in India suffered heavily as the paintings crumbled along with the varnish within a period of five years. This disaster was recorded by Maindron in 1884. It highlighted the need for

involving the scientific community in the field of conservation and for recognising conservation as a scientific profession involving research and training.

The incident also opened the eyes of Lord Curzon who became Governor General of India. In his address to the Asiatic Society of West Bengal on 6 February 1900, he declared, 'Epigraphy should not be set behind research any more than research should be set behind conservation. It is, in my judgment, equally our duty to dig and discover, to classify, reproduce and describe to copy and decipher and to cherish and conserve.' This understanding about the conservation of cultural property in India led to the formation of a science branch of the ASI. Though it was slow in growing, the formation of new central and state governments after Independence gave it some momentum.

At the national level, the Department of Culture, Ministry of Human Resource Development is the nodal agency directly responsible for the activities related to the conservation of cultural property. There are several institutions under its control through

which policies are implemented. The most high-profile among them is the Archaeological Survey of India. The ASI can boast of having the oldest and biggest set up in the field of conservation. The conservation branch of the Survey has the infrastructure for structural conservation of monuments while the chemical branch takes care of the scientific preservation of monuments, antiques and works of art.

**T**he first chemical laboratory of the Survey was established in Calcutta before Independence, headed by a chemist trained at the British Museum Laboratory under the orders of the Government of India. Currently, the headquarters of the science branch are in Dehra Dun with a well equipped central laboratory and several other zonal laboratories. The mandate of the Archaeological Survey is to preserve the cultural wealth of the country in the form of monuments declared protected by the government, museum objects in the site museums, treatment of antiques and the scientific study of objects during and after excavation and so on, in addition to research and training.

It is important to note that the first training programme for conservation in India was organised in 1940 when Sir Mortimer Wheeler was the Director General of the ASI. He established the Taxila School of Archaeology, and the field laboratory attached to the school trained young conservators in cleaning and consolidation of antiques. Presently the science branch organises a number of training programmes benefiting personnel who are in service.

A landmark in the history of conservation in India was the establishment of the National Research Laboratory for Conservation (NRLC) of cultural property in 1976. The laboratory was set up for fulfilling the fol-

lowing objectives: (a) Research for the development of better methods of conservation; (b) Technical study of the art and archaeological materials; (c) Technical assistance to museums, archaeological departments and other institutions; (d) Training; (e) Publication and documentation; and (f) International liaison.

Over the years the laboratory has grown into a multi-disciplinary research centre with generous support from UNDP and UNESCO. The laboratory has contributed commendably to the improvement in existing methods of conservation to suit Indian conditions, development of new methods, technical studies of ancient materials to throw light on ancient Indian technology, organising regular and specialised programmes to benefit conservators, archaeologists and museum personnel. The laboratory has successfully executed several conservation projects in India and neighbouring countries.

**T**he Central Conservation Laboratory attached to the National Museum is a model museum laboratory with sophisticated equipment and trained manpower located in the capital. It is the centre for major activities, both national and international, in the field of museum conservation. In addition to successfully completing a number of conservation projects, the laboratory organises short-term programmes for conservation professionals.

The establishment of the National Museum Institute of Art, History, Museumology and Conservation (a deemed university) has added to the significance of the National Museum. The institute offers both a master's and doctoral programme in conservation. Within a short span of time the institute has attracted attention with the conservation com-

munity welcoming qualified conservators and scientists from the institute.

**T**he National Archives of India, Delhi; The National Museum of Modern Art, Delhi; Indian Museum, Calcutta; Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad and several others have well equipped conservation laboratories. The National Archives of India is the central place for the scientific study of manuscripts and other archival materials. It also organises training programmes benefiting professional conservators. Since the workloads in other National Museum laboratories are heavy, they do not generally involve themselves in activities other than the actual conservation of their own museum collections.

The Department of Science and Technology, GOI though not directly involved in conservation or conservation research has a major role in inducing the scientists of various institutions to take up projects related to conservation. The department has constituted a committee called Application of Science and Technology in Conservation of Cultural Property (ASTECH), with eminent scientists drawn from universities and important research centres in India. The committee advises on funding specific projects in specialised areas of conservation which otherwise would be neglected.

The successful completion of a project on microbial deterioration of stone monuments by the National Research Laboratory for conservation of cultural property is a good example of such efforts. Further, the department has succeeded in bringing together scientists working in universities, Indian Institutes of Technology, Regional Research Laboratories of the CSIR and so on, with conservation professionals and scientists. They have discussed their problems and had

effective interactions to jointly tackle some complicated research problems in conservation. The 1993 seminar organised by the Department of Science and Technology at the National Research Laboratory for conservation of wall paintings in India marked the beginning of such efforts.

**S**everal other departments, including the Department of Atomic Energy, have shown interest in the problems related to conservation. Homi Bhabha, for instance, was interested in the neutron activation analysis of ancient materials. This resulted in the thermoluminescence dating of pottery by the Homi Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, and a seminar on archaeological dating and thermoluminescence organised at Kalpakkam, Chennai.

The Oil and Natural Gas Commission, Geological Survey of India, National Geophysical Research Institute, and the National Institute of Oceanography too have encouraged projects in conservation, especially those relating to underwater excavations. Further, institutions like the Defence Research Laboratory, Hyderabad or the Electronic Research Corporation of India, Hyderabad have cooperated with the Madras Government Museum in fingerprinting of ancient South Indian bronzes, using the latest available techniques such as X-ray fluorescence, holography, radiography and so on.

The state of affairs in the field of conservation of cultural property under the various state governments in India is, however, not encouraging. Not all the states have facilities for conservation and even in places where laboratories exist, they are neither well equipped nor have trained manpower. Despite these constraints, some state laboratories have done commendable work, not only in executing conservation projects, but also

by contributing in areas of conservation research.

In this context, the work of the Madras Government Museum Laboratory is noteworthy. The laboratory attained recognition for its work on electrolytic restoration of bronzes as early as 1940 under the guidance of F.H. Gravely, who headed the laboratory. During this period a new building was constructed inside the museum premises exclusively for the laboratory. This laboratory and the electrochemical treatment it developed attracted the attention of Colin G. Fink at the Metropolitan Museum of Art who preferred this treatment for bronzes and made modifications in equipment to suit large bronzes. But this prestigious laboratory continues to be severely constrained, with the same staff strength as it had in 1940.

**A** state laboratory for conservation was set up in Kerala in 1979. The state administration decided on a centralised well-equipped unit, rather than small units in each museum or department. The laboratory has successfully completed several projects, not only for government institutions but also for temples, churches and individuals. It has cooperated with universities and national institutions like the CSIR laboratories and the ISRO laboratories at Thiruvananthapuram to undertake research programmes on problems related to the preservation of palm leaves, metal artifacts and photochemical deterioration.

Several states like Punjab, Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have moderate facilities for preservation of their cultural wealth. But it is painful to note that some important states like Karnataka and Maharashtra have few facilities of their own. However, it is

some satisfaction that most state administrations today are aware of the need for conserving the antiques and art objects under their control. They are able to do so with the help of national institutions like the National Research Laboratory for Conservation and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) laboratories. At a meeting of the state directors and administrators organised in 1993 at NRLC Lucknow, it was resolved that there should be state level laboratories for conservation in all the states. The recommendation is yet to materialise.

It is a fundamental responsibility of the government to preserve the rich cultural heritage for posterity – be it monuments, museum objects, art treasure or manuscripts. It is difficult to answer the fundamental question of whether our administration has succeeded in fulfilling this obligation. Even if it is assumed that all protected monuments, materials in the museums, the records in our archives, books in the library, and paintings in art galleries are safe and properly looked after by the administration, what is happening to the cultural wealth not protected by any organisation, or in the hands of private individuals, remains an important question.

**T**he foremost challenge before the government is to provide protection to the neglected treasures. To date, the government does not have a clear idea as to the size of the problem. For example, a single *grantha bhandar* may have thousands of manuscripts and a single temple may have hundreds of sculptures – the list is endless. One has to review existing facilities or the allocation of funds given the scale of the problem. It is evident that the funds allocated for conservation are inadequate. The departments

entrusted with the task do not receive proportionate increases, compared to other departments, whether at the Centre or in the states. At the same time, the administration is under pressure to take on the additional burden of protecting more monuments and acquiring more objects for their museums or galleries. In such a situation, the neglect is likely to continue.

In 1993, the Government of India appointed a committee of experts under the Chairmanship of Saroj Ghosh to review the situation and for coordinating existing facilities such that the neglected areas would get some attention. One of the main proposals considered by the committee was for an extension of the facilities of the National Research Laboratory to all the states in the form of regional laboratories, as also to encourage NGO's like INTACH conservation centres.

Currently, state governments and private institutions and individuals look to the NRLC and INTACH conservation centres for solving their problems relating to conservation. This is possible since both the centres do not have collections of their own. The NRLC has been able to excel as a research centre since it is both designed as one and its scientists, who have specialised in multi-disciplinary areas of conservation like stone, metal, bio-deterioration and so on, could continue with their specialisations throughout their career. The Central Pay Commission has recommended the amalgamation of NRLC and the Archaeological Survey of India to create a common archaeological service. Whether this step – a brainchild of administrators, not of professionals – will be detrimental to the conservation profession in India and whether it will adversely affect the research on various specialised branches in conservation remains a question that only time can answer.

## Showcasing heritage

ASHIS BANERJEE

WHATEVER its pre-history as an organised movement, the beginnings of contemporary conservation can be traced to mid-19th century Europe. This coincided with the rise of industrialisation and urbanisation, both of which affected the built environment as well as began to replace things made by the hand of man. Conservation evolved as a dialectical counterpoint, evoking an appreciation for crafts on the one hand and the traditional built heritage on the other. At least in some parts of Europe, this phase also coincided with the revival of religiosity which, at least initially, resulted in attempts to restore old churches, often without the necessary knowledge of the traditional building techniques.

In the U.K. the name of William Morris is most representative of this new genre of romantic thinking about the past. His name is also associated with the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), set up in the 1860s and which was, in a manner of speaking, a precursor to the National Trust set up in 1895. The SPAB still enjoys a healthy existence, organising informed lectures all over the country for

the buffs and specialists alike. The National Trust, on the other hand, has a membership of 2.5 million and looks after 70% of the coastline of Britain, in addition to hundreds of heritage properties.

The SPAB initiated the revival of traditional building techniques, moulding the motive to 'repair' into a specialised focus on the correct techniques of restoration and conservation of stone, timber, stained glass, frescoes, paintings and so on. The National Trust developed this knowledge and applied it to the vast heritage properties which came under its control. These efforts were reinforced by the English Heritage – a government initiative.

In India the interest in conservation arose not so much as a consequence of similar circumstances, but as a transference of the mood in Europe, especially Britain. The Archaeological Society of India (ASI) set up in 1861, extended the work of the Asiatic Society which was already in existence (and concerned itself with oriental knowledge and art), as well as of the Public Works Department and sometimes the Garrison Engineer. It represented a facet of the larger effort of colonial rule to empirically record and classify information about the colony. Thus the ASI was a part of the larger family of surveys initiated and set up by the colonial rulers such as the Survey of India, the Botanical Survey, the Zoological Survey, the Geological Survey and the Anthropological Survey of India.

The approach of the ASI to many of the sites that were rescued from obscurity was not only to conserve but also to protect them from vandalism and wanton destruction arising out of indifference or ignorance. There were many sites, for example Buddhist ones, which had ceased to have an

emotional link with the local people but were nevertheless considered historically important and valuable for a tradition that had largely shifted out of mainstream India.

The publications of the ASI and the signage used at the sites do not indicate any pressing desire to communicate to a wider audience, except in the specialist's terms. The idea, however, was not to keep the visitor at bay. On the contrary, through a resolution of Parliament, the entry fees to heritage sites and monuments were kept low so that most people would be able to afford to enjoy the glorious achievements of the past. In order not to compromise the flow of funds into conservation by making it contingent upon earnings from entry fees, a provision was made to sustain the ASI from the Consolidated Fund of India. Archaeology departments set up under the state governments followed much the same pattern.

The basic presupposition behind conservation is that the impetus to conserve derives from an understanding that it is necessary for us to preserve for posterity what we have inherited from the past. This effort would be nullified if carried out in a manner which diminishes the authenticity of the original. Preserving with authenticity is what conservation is then all about. In this sense conservation looks beyond the immediate linkages between heritage sites and the communities surrounding them. It derives its legitimacy as well as its relevance from history and addresses mankind as a whole.

Conservation therefore is not devoid of a pedagogic purpose. In its broadest sense it includes the appreciation and enjoyment of the greatest manifestations of human imagination and the highest perfection of skills. For those of the *present*, it strives to

hold a mirror in the form of the past in all its complexity and therefore without bias or prejudice. For those of the *future*, conservation ensures that they too get an equal chance to understand and enjoy the past. Implicitly, it is a responsibility borne by the present towards the future.

In general, therefore, conservation of the built heritage is no different from the conservation of nature with its discourse of 'intergenerational equity'. The argument being that if this generation permits the extinction of endemic species and rich biodiversity, or allows large scale destruction of forest resources or depletion of aquifers, there will be irreversible changes in the environment with losses not within the capacity of the present generation to compute or compensate.

Similarly, the wiping out of historical evidence by negligence or deliberate acts of destruction through a privileging of other needs can lead to an irreversible loss of knowledge, denying the generations to come – not only of an opportunity to understand and interpret the past but also to see themselves as a continuity of an aesthetic and creative tradition. This sense of a possible loss informs the well thought out 'Culture and Development Report' of UNESCO, published a couple of years ago.

The following passage taken from the Report of the Expert Group on Archaeology, 1984 (also known as the Mirdha Committee Report) speaks eloquently and with a certain degree of pathos on this subject:

In a developing country like India, both central and state governments often launch irrigation or industrial projects. In the case of river valley and dam projects, important archaeological areas are threatened with submergence and the Survey is not



kept aware of these projects at the initial stage. Only at the last stage is the archaeologist called upon to take up salvage operations. It may be recalled that in the case of Nagarjunakonda, a high power committee with the then prime minister as chairman took adequate steps for the excavation of the site and for transplantation of some important excavated structures to a higher altitude. Such a well-thought out approach is a rarity, with the result that many relics uncovered by the spade of the archaeologists are doomed to be irrevocably lost to posterity.

**T**urning to another facet, it is time to ask whether conservation could benefit from a more pro-active approach to tourism. In India the predominant view in conservation circles is negative about tourism, seen as antithetical to conservation. This is frustrating for other agencies given the responsibility of promoting tourism at the central and the state levels. Equally, this has resulted in a mindset such that those incharge of tourism promotion often initiate steps in the field of cultural tourism with utter disregard for conservation. A policy dialogue to reconcile the two interests seems to be urgently needed. Such a dialogue could establish different sets of guidelines for different kinds of cultural sites. Appropriate regulations for visitor management could then be commonly agreed upon and evolved.

In the last couple of years we have seen the beginning of thawing of attitudes. A few state tourism departments have begun working with the ASI to develop sites in a manner that is compatible to both conservation and tourism. But all this is still preliminary and *ad hoc*. This process now needs to be grounded upon a policy debate at the highest levels and with the wid-

est transparency to erase mutual suspicion.

It is instructive to note that in an area of much more recent origin — eco-tourism — a better practice has emerged. This may well be because it does not have to carry the heavy baggage of the past. But the main reason seems to have been a systematic co-ordination at the national level between the ministries of environment and tourism with practitioners and NGOs. This process has also been facilitated by the existence of cogent literature on the subject generated by responsible international organisations such as the IUCN and others.

The guidelines on eco-tourism are already in place, though it might be too early to pronounce judgement on their operational integrity. The important point is the existence of a document as a common reference point which can, as all such important documents do, serve as a yardstick to measure whether there have been deviations. Equally, it is a document that could be improved in the light of practice.

**A**ll over Europe one senses both pride and enjoyment in the showcasing of heritage, be it Stratford upon Avon or the Blenheim castle, York, Bath or London. Similarly in Paris, Versailles, Rouen or Florence, Venice and Rome. Visitors are made to feel welcome. Often the flavour of the site as it was during its peak, is evoked through displays and costumed guides. In return for this feeling of hospitality the visitors willingly pay a handsome entry fee. They also buy printed literature and memorabilia, which encourages more people to visit the site. In their own idiom countries closer home, such as Sri Lanka and China, are also making visits to their historic sites attractive and enjoyable. An important element in this is to

make sites easily accessible and travel to them less cumbersome.

It is true that places, which are visited by a large number of tourists, come under pressure of wear and tear and therefore demand higher investments in maintenance. But a combination of mechanisms, fiscal and administrative, can be devised in order to cope with visitor pressure. Italy, for instance, has in recent times re-examined its conservation strategy and brought about changes in its cultural administration on the organisational as well as the financial side.

**B**uilding on the partnerships that are now emerging between the ASI, the tourism departments, NGOs and private initiatives it is time we set up an inter-ministerial dialogue between the department of culture, the department of tourism and the ministries of urban development and environment. This process should encourage participation from established NGOs and private entrepreneurs and academia. Position papers could be written, circulated and debated. It would be equally important to prepare case studies from various angles such as visitor impact, visitor satisfaction, revenue generation, environmental consequences and so on. This would help in monitoring trends and reviewing guidelines as required. In other words, a sensitive management approach may evolve out of the process.

An important element in this process has to do with a better understanding of the average visitor profile. It may be necessary to shed the view that the visitor must be a hard currency foreign tourist. More likely, the average visitor will be the average Indian. This visitor too needs to be provided basic facilities and information at a historic site, while at the same time being initiated into a learning process whereby he respects the need for

conservation. This is the condition on which thinking and planning ought to be done.

**A** primary rationale for promoting tourism in India is to enable Indians to understand and enjoy the scale and the depth of our cultural traditions. Regionally constructed as the Indian personality is, it is equally thirsty for acquaintance with other regions. This has been the case for hundreds of years, *teertha* being the most compulsive and primordial example of tourism in our country. There is then a tradition to build upon. And who has not seen the Bengali and the Gujrati tourists from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, roughing it out in buses and chartered trains, which are often parked in railway sidings for days in the hot sun. There are not many vandals among these sunburnt faces.

The essence of India lies in its reality as a network of cultures which constitutes its cultural heritage. This is an enigma only to those who do not know India well, not to the average Indian who comfortably traverses through the local, the regional and the national frames of reference in the most normal way and speaks almost simultaneously in three to four languages and dialects. It is for this tourist that it is most important to conserve our cultural heritage, because the insights sown in their minds through such experiences will help bind this country together and sustain its tradition of pluralism and tolerance. The less they are exposed the more un-Indian they are likely to be.

But can they pay? Probably not enough to sustain fancy, expensive hotels but definitely enough to sustain heritage sites and the infrastructure necessary to make them accessible. With a correct strategy this bulk tourism can sustain both conservation and development of sites. The others can

bring in the dollars and sustain the fancy hotels and the upmarket end of the tourist trade.

For this, however, there is a need to focus intensively on the management of sites, the creation of interpretation centres, the promotion of good literature, curio shops and a whole range of facilities which make for good commerce. There is no need to be apologetic about the business aspect of tourism, though the sleaze and corruption that the foreign visitor has to go through needs urgent regulation and drastic control. It is their right to demand 'good value for money', not to be tricked and cheated by touts at every turn.

**F**inally, India must search for niche markets in tourism which bring in non-monetary benefits. One large pool of potential visitor is the NRI and his children. We need special entrepreneurship to respond to the needs of Indian children growing up in the US and other countries who would love to be exposed to the beauty of this land and its fine heritage of art and built form. Knowing their land better will enable them to be more confident growing up in the West. Tourism, thus, presents both a pedagogic and a diplomatic opportunity.

To sum up the main issues then – conservation developed in India under very special circumstances but in terms of its timing was not far behind European trends. The specificity of the circumstances of its origin stamped conservation with a special culture. It became the domain of the expert with a certain bias towards exclusivism. Looking to the changing circumstances elsewhere in the world, and indeed to creative endeavours in other domains such as eco-tourism within India, it may be advisable to initiate fresh thinking in the area of cultural conservation and cultural tourism.

# Stand and deliver

VIVEK MALHOTRA

THE role of culture and cultural heritage and its relationship to society and the environment is being increasingly identified by countries and global organisations as an asset of crucial importance to the development and continuity of human knowledge and values. In India, the body of cultural property – the tangible built heritage – is vast in its size and range, encompassing forms, styles and structures that are as varied as its people. It is widely accepted that this built heritage is threatened by environmental and social changes, alongside deterioration through neglect, poor maintenance, ageing, theft and vandalism.

Whether this heritage can be saved, developed, or destroyed is dependent on decisions that are taken at various levels. These decisions can sometimes be taken through ignorance, indifference, greed, or to meet political and socio-economic ends. These decisions are made by government agencies at national, state and local levels, or by organisations in the non-government sector, by business, and sometimes by individuals.

It is recognised that the scale of the task of conserving, preserving and revitalising the built heritage or man-made environment presents a formidable and complex challenge. But every challenge can also be seen as an opportunity. Among the plethora of interlocking actions that are a necessary part of any strategic plan, the development of institutional capacity to

manage heritage is one of the most urgent. There are, of course, several agencies engaged in this task, mainly in the government sector, but an increasing number of NGOs and academic institutions are also getting involved. The building of institutional capacity is dependent largely on developing two key resources fundamental to any organisation or institution – its funding base and people. This essay particularly looks at the development of the human resources, that is, the management, staff and volunteers engaged in cultural work. It also briefly looks at how a greater awareness of the issues around conservation could be generated.

It is an accepted axiom that in any endeavour it is the people who work to fulfil its mission who matter the most. They are possibly the organisation's greatest resource. This axiom applies to all areas of life, wherein human contribution makes the critical and creative difference. Bill Gates, the CEO of Microsoft, reportedly remarked about his staff, 'My assets walk out of the office door every evening.' Much the same can be said for those whose work is to preserve and conserve the man-made environment. But organisations and institutions in this field, in common with those in the arts and culture, have been slow in paying attention to the human resource needs of the organisation, particularly in comparison to the corporate and business sectors.

This is partly because organisations concerned with the arts and with conservation and heritage have developed in the non-profit, subsidised sector. They tend to be marked by value-laden missions and objectives, an attitude that the people who work for them are at all times creative and caring, and an absence of strategic planning. It is popularly assumed that the rewards of commitment to the work are sufficient for the people involved. But is it enough, given that the reliance on human resources is significant in this sector – in terms of creativity, and of inputs of time and energy by managers, staff and volunteers. Thus, the question of the development of human resources in building institutional capacity is central to the activity of such bodies. It is important to ensure that the people concerned are provided the necessary tools to make informed decisions about the environment and heritage.

In its report, *Our Creative Diversity*, the World Commission on Culture and Development calls for new thinking and training in order to revalue the relationship of societies to their heritage. It suggests that this be done by building a new institutional base structured around this relationship to the life of societies and to cultural continuities. Among its many recommendations is a suggestion that the entry of a wider range of disciplines into this new institutional base would *per se* create new educational institutions, new multi-disciplinary departments (in existing institutions), and new training approaches; and that these institutions would help to forge sensitivity and respect for the built heritage (see section on 'cultural heritage for development', p.197).

What is being stressed is the involvement of a wide range of people from different disciplines and a new

set of partners – some of whom may not even be aware of the responsibility they share for changes made to the built heritage. The cohesion in the training and education model being suggested cannot be faulted, although it is somewhat utopian. It is at best part of a longer term, structural change approach to cultural training in India. However, what can be achieved are versions of this proposition – training programmes to develop specific skills and knowledge, and educational activities which seek to create a wider awareness of relevant issues.

It was suggested earlier that the profile and characteristics of organisations and institutions in the heritage and cultural sectors are similar, that they tend to share the same problems and constraints, albeit with some differences in terms of specialisations. Their problems tend to centre around the management of institutions, where incompetent administration, mismanagement of funds, an absence of written missions, objectives and plans, poor vision and leadership, all combine to create a chaotic situation. There are a few examples of successful organisations, but they have largely been dependent on the leadership of a charismatic individual who has been able to drive the organisation forward. But all too often, once that individual is no longer on the scene, the organisation crumbles. This clearly suggests an absence of a second line of leadership and an absence of succession planning, vital for building institutions for the long term.

Another related point about those who lead organisations concerns their background. Should they be generalists, specialists, scholars, or artists? All these categories of people have been tried and no one model appears to fit the best. The minimum

criteria should be that the person has an understanding of culture or heritage, and the specifics of the organisation's work, combined with an aptitude for the type of work. *If the aptitude does not exist, they should be trained for the purpose.* What is required is a unique combination with, on the one hand, an understanding of cultural work, its content and its context, and on the other, skills in modern management techniques and processes.

The training and education institutions that can play a role in developing skills and awareness tend to fall into two core areas – those with a technical focus, and those concerned with the provision of management skills. The former would ensure that the types and levels of technical skills and technologies required in conservation or other areas of cultural work are of an international standard and are appropriate to the Indian setting.

The latter provision would take the form of management training programmes to provide instruction on the basics of management skills in areas such as financial management, fund raising, strategic planning, marketing, and advocacy. This list of management areas is not meant to be exhaustive, but to indicate the scope of such programmes. The content would, of course, need to be adapted to the needs and requirements of the sector and not reproduced in the same manner as it is offered in business management courses. It would be rooted in the Indian cultural context. The menu of courses available should be on a modular basis, preferably as a taught diploma, such that it would eventually be possible to meet a majority of the specific needs of cultural organisations in different sub-sectors.

A new initiative called the Sanskriti Institute of Management for Cultural Organisations (SIM) based in

New Delhi is being started in the area of cultural management training. The initiative is aimed at organisations, both large and small, working in the wider cultural arena that includes the intangible heritage. Its proposal identified the fact that the development of human resources to manage cultural organisations was necessary in a climate of limited resources and expanding needs.

The ability to operate within the economic constraints of the cultural sector is vital for the long term, as is the need to acquire skills to provide support and encouragement to the sector in ways that are rational and cost effective. The objective is to create a 'culture of management' within the culture sector itself. However, the proposed institution, which seeks to inculcate the principles of management in a cultural context, must itself be imbued with an understanding and appreciation of the roots of cultural practices and services. Thus it would base its work on developing a sound understanding and knowledge of the present cultural context and examine the background and history of cultural organisations in India through research, case studies and field visits.

**T**he initial findings of a limited training needs survey of cultural organisations, commissioned as part of the research methodology and reported at the inaugural conference of the SIM in March of this year, came up with some alarming findings about the sector. The main results were that managers showed a lack of awareness of the weaknesses and problems of their organisations; many organisations had flat structures and were personality driven; there was a lack of understanding of how and what management means in their organisational context; there was a focus on the train-

ing needs only of artists, concurrent with limited perception of how management training might help the organisation's leadership; an absence of networking among cultural organisations and, consequently, limited knowledge and sharing of problems and solutions; limited pride in working for the cultural sector; and last but not least, a high level of apathy and complacency. This list is indicative of the work that needs to be done.

**I**f we have set goals to be achieved in the cultural arena, it is appropriate that such management training, to be more widely accessed and understood, should be open to all the people connected with the sector: managers, artistic and administrative personnel working in the performing and visual arts, in museums, crafts organisations, festivals, exhibitions, heritage organisations, arts centres, relevant government departments, policy-makers, promoters, trustees and board members, and experienced and dedicated volunteers wanting to learn new skills.

One way of building awareness and raising consciousness about the built heritage is through the formation of strategic collaborations between heritage organisations, other organisations in the same or similar field, non-profit organisations, business, government agencies, the community and other stakeholders – for mutual benefits to the partners and to the public. This is a grouping which brings together all stakeholders with the requisite skills, experience, knowledge, funding and commitment to carry out the decision. This could be centered around projects or be part of a long term view. Such collaboration is meant to indicate a commitment and relationship which benefits from comprehensive planning and communication on many levels between the

partners. Some of the possible benefits that would arise are:

- \* Working with other organisations (who may initially be perceived as competitors) could provide a basis for cutting costs by combining certain administrative functions and overhead expenses to achieve economies of scale.

- \* It could provide the basis for extending the 'customer base' through an expansion in the numbers of people reached by pooling mailing lists. Hence, an awareness of issues around the project could be spread wider.

- \* The development of new funding sources otherwise not accessible from the base of a single organisation. Funding can be a corollary to collaboration.

- \* Business would be more interested in making a contribution to a project where a high level of commitment and communication exists, on the basis of being good corporate citizens and for increased visibility.

- \* Government agencies would be able plan in a strategic manner and improve the utilisation of their resources.

- \* Collaborations would attract more media attention because of their relative uniqueness and effectiveness, thus generating a greater degree of awareness.

**T**he formation of viable partnerships is a major route to achieving an organisation's goals and providing better services to their customers as also to the community. Each partner must learn from the other's strengths, be flexible and accept cultural differences. The processes undertaken prior to the formation of the partnerships are the key management tools – to be able to diagnose, identify, plan, analyse, achieve and sustain the objectives of the organisation and thus manage the financial and human resources in an effective manner. This could be a positive way forward.

# Reminiscences of a conservator

○ P. AGRAWAL

WE often complain that requisite facilities for conservation of cultural heritage are not available in the country today. Yet if we compare the situation with what it was immediately after Independence, there is no doubt that it is far better now. Looking back in time some 45 years ago, I am reminded that there were few conservators in the country. When I joined the Archaeological Survey of India in 1952, I was attached to the chemical laboratory of the Museums Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India. I distinctly remember that we were hardly three or four, besides our boss, T.R. Gairola, one of the pioneers in this field.

There was one small hall where the laboratory for restoration of antiquities, paintings and scrolls was situated; it was the place for analysis and also for office work. The laboratory tables were neither designed nor fabricated for laboratory work. No one

knew for what purpose those tables with heavy legs and bulky tops were manufactured. We were badly in need of some tables but had no money in our budget. One fine day we saw stone tables, huge big tables, lying in a store-room full of junk. These tables were not in use and we surreptitiously transported them to our laboratory which we were determined to build.

By way of equipment, we had a small microscope of which we were proud. Later, when we obtained an ultraviolet light, it was a cause for celebration. There was no money to purchase a fumigation chamber; though it was considered absolutely necessary for the wooden objects. A make-shift fumigation chamber was fabricated with an empty oil drum, also recovered from the junk store. Some glass tubes were inserted in the drum by drilling holes at appropriate places. The fumigating gas was allowed to enter the chamber through

the tubes, which were then blocked with pinch stop-cocks. This home-made fumigation chamber served us well for many years till we could afford a proper wooden one. The moral of the story is that one does innovate when in dire need.

**W**e also wanted to build a library for the laboratory. Unfortunately, our boss, T.R. Gairola, could sanction only Rs 50 against any one bill. Any amount above that needed the approval of the Director General of the ASI, a procedure which could take months or years. We found a solution to that predicament by purchasing one book at a time, thus limiting the bill to under Rs 50. Luckily, in those days, books were not expensive. Also, there were few books on conservation. We soon had a sizable library.

This was my first experience of establishing a conservation laboratory without much money. That experience helped me a great deal in the future, when I took upon myself the task of creating conservation centres throughout the country.

Incidentally, this was the biggest museum conservation laboratory of its time in India. The National Museum, New Delhi which I was to join later, was being built at that time. Its newly founded collection of art and archaeological objects was still at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

In the early 1950s there were no formal training programmes. Conservators are lucky that we now have the National Museum Institute of Conservation, Museumology and Art History, which offers a two years MA degree in conservation. We had to struggle by ourselves, under the supervision and guidance of T.R. Gairola, a very thorough teacher.

When the National Museum moved into its new building in 1960, the laboratory had already started

functioning in one of the big halls on the second floor. It was the foresight of planners that the conservation laboratory was considered an essential and integral part of the museum. The National Museum Laboratory functioned under T.R. Gairola with me as his deputy, and steadily gained in reputation. It became famous for its technique of transferring wall paintings from old dilapidated buildings to new sites. Its first project was at Chamba for transferring wall paintings from the Rang Mahal to the National Museum and to the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. It was the first time that such a transfer of wall paintings was successfully carried out in India. In the years to come, the National Museum was asked to oversee many such projects.

**T**he National Museum Laboratory soon became a central laboratory for Indian museums, giving advice, imparting training and treating objects of other museums, besides those of the National Museum.

The establishment of the National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property (NRLC) at Lucknow was a landmark in the history of conservation in India. Having worked and trained at the Central Institution of Restoration, Rome, I was determined that there should be a similar institution in India.

At the beginning it was only a dream and even in my wildest imagination I never thought that it would become a reality. But with the interest and support of Nurul Hassan, Union Minister of Education at the time, the dream took a concrete shape in 1976. The Ministry of Finance allocated a tiny budget for the first year. Given my earlier experience of working with minimal budgets and infrastructure, I accepted the challenge without hesitation, knowing

fully well that once the laboratory was established and started to show results, money would be no problem. And indeed that is what happened.

**T**he NRLC received grants from UNDP and UNESCO for the purchase of most of its sophisticated and advanced equipment. Its scientists and conservators were trained abroad in the latest techniques of analysis and research. The Government of India approved the construction of its own specially designed building, which became functional in 1986. Several research projects were undertaken by the NRLC and it was soon counted among the best research laboratories.

I gave special attention to the library, which acquired most of the important books on conservation, analysis, microscopy, biodeterioration, petrology, and other related subjects. I simply could not believe the remarkable change from the days when I had to order one book at a time. In the days when I was with the museum branch, we could not subscribe to even one good journal. The NRLC library now regularly receives over 100 journals from all parts of the world. What a difference! We have every reason to be proud.

By the end the '80s, major institutions like the ASI; the National Museum, New Delhi; Indian Museum, Calcutta; the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, and others had conservation laboratories of their own. However, many of us felt that there were no arrangements for the restoration of art objects belonging to private owners, or with temples, churches and other religious organisations.

An opportunity of this nature arose with the establishment of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in 1984. Pupul Jayakar and Martand Singh were keen to initiate projects for conservation of art

materials. I was summoned to New Delhi to meet Jayakar, B.K. Thapar and Martand Singh. Soon a plan for setting up the first INTACH Conservation Centre at Lucknow was prepared; it came into being in 1985. As always, money was in short supply but that did not deter us. I knew from past experience that money is not a major hurdle for a worthwhile project. I was still the Director of the NRLC and agreed to act as the Honorary Adviser of the INTACH centre. The burden of its day-to-day functioning fell on my wife, Usha Agrawal, who had received her training at the National Museum and at the Regional Office of the International Council of Museums, New Delhi.

**S**everal important projects were taken up by the conservation centre, rechristened as the Indian Conservation Institute in 1989. The ICI has covered the entire spectrum of conservation activity – a wide variety of objects, including stone sculptures, metal objects, manuscripts, books, oil paintings, wall paintings, textiles, and so on. There are separate divisions dealing with each of these areas. There is a photo-section and library. Artifacts are received from governmental as well as non-governmental sources from all over the country. Soon ICI was recognised as a major institution. I think what has contributed most to its functioning, besides the devotion of its staff, is the flexibility and autonomy in decision-making. There is hardly any interference in our functioning from the chairman or the secretaries of INTACH.

We received financial support from agencies like The Ford Foundation and NORAD. INTACH U.K. Trust supported a very major project of ICI entitled National Project on Wall Paintings. The launching of this project was a major achievement of ICI,

encompassing several areas in its fold and described 'as a most comprehensive project of its type ever undertaken anywhere.'

**W**hat made it unique? Its size? Its concepts? Its wide range in time and scale, or was it something else? I think it was everything put together. The main components of the project were:

i) Survey of wall paintings of India to prepare descriptive reports and carry out photographic documentation.

ii) Analysis and identification of materials of wall paintings of India. Samples of plasters and pigments from wall paintings were collected and analysed in the laboratory. A large number of wall paintings from Rajasthan, Kerala, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and other states were covered and analytical data on them is available. Research on problems of conservation was also part of the project. Working in collaboration with the NRLC, the problems of biodeterioration of wall paintings were looked into and solutions found.

iii) Actual conservation of wall paintings. Several important sites were examined and conserved. These were (a) Naithod Temple, Kerala (b) Sheesh Mahal, Nagaur, Rajasthan (c) Chhatris of Kusum Sarovar, Govardhan, U.P. (d) Shree Brijraj Swami Temple, Nurpur, H.P. (e) Rani Jodha Palace, Nagaur (f) Sri Rangaswami Temple, Srirangam, Tamil Nadu (g) St. Alosius Chapel, Mangalore, Karnataka (h) Holy Name Cathedral, Mumbai.

All this while, I was conscious of the shortage of trained personnel. Consequently, two training courses in conservation of wall paintings, each of six months duration, were held to prepare future conservators. We also organised two national seminars on

conservation of wall paintings, one in 1989 and the other in 1995.

Several important publications have been brought out on wall paintings. Mention may be made of Examination and Conservation of Wall Paintings of Sheesh Mahal, Nagaur (1989); Wall Paintings of India – a historical perspective (1990); and Conservation of Wall Paintings in India – Achievements and Problems (1995).

Personally, the national project on wall paintings has been one of the most satisfying I have been associated with. Do I have any regrets? Yes, there is, at least one. I was keen that it become a truly national project, with several major institutions collaborating and fulfilling their selected parts. Several meetings were held with representatives of major institutions. Everyone agreed to a collaborative programme, but unfortunately when the time came for action, it did not materialise. I hope a day will come when all our institutions can work as a team, for a common cause.

**A**nother thrust area has been training. ICI has regularly organised courses in two main areas: preventive and curative conservation, the former as workshops, the latter in courses, usually of six months duration. These courses are regularly held at ICI Lucknow, particularly in the domain of conservation of paper manuscripts. Besides these regular courses, we also accept interns from abroad for studies in conservation. ICI has invited foreign specialists for training in areas like the use of leaf caster in restoration, metallurgical studies in archaeology, and use of low suction table.

Encouraged by the success of the Lucknow centre, we thought of establishing other centres in the country. The New Delhi Art Conservation Centre founded in 1990 has prepared



an excellent team of restorers specialising in various aspects of conservation, particularly oil paintings. This centre has conserved/restored paintings of masters like Jamini Roy, Amrita Shergil, Raja Ravi Varma, Nandlal Bose and several others. An exhibition entitled 'Raja Ravi Varma and Amrita Shergil Restored' was mounted at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, to present to the public the implications and intricacies of restoration.

I firmly believed that there should be an INTACH conservation centre for the South, as bringing objects all the way to New Delhi or Lucknow is not easy. As we did not have enough funds, we managed to persuade the Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore to collaborate with us. There was active support from T.P. Issar, former chief secretary of Karnataka and Nanjunda Rao, general secretary of Chitrakala Parishath. Initially we loaned some of the furniture and equipment from ICI Lucknow, which in a way became the mother institution. A nucleus of the laboratory was soon set up and a trained senior conservator, Chandras Bhat, was sent from Lucknow. ICKPAC was inaugurated by the Governor of Karnataka in July 1993. Since then it has handled several important projects.

Encouraged by our success, negotiations were initiated with the Department of Culture, Government of Orissa, with the intention of starting a centre in the East. The authorities were convinced that a conservation centre was needed for Orissa and the government was ready to finance it if a matching amount could be raised from INTACH. NORAD came to the rescue. Thus the fourth centre under INTACH came up to serve the eastern part of India. It specialises in conservation of palm leaf manuscripts and

will soon be functioning as a training institute in this field for Asian countries.

So far we had thought of establishing a centre for a region or state. However, sometimes the collection of one single institution is so immense that it may require a conservation unit of its own. One such institution was the Rampur Raza Library. At the initiative of Moti Lal Vora, Governor of U.P., a collaborative project involving the Rampur Raza Library and ICI was prepared with the purpose of establishing a full-fledged conservation centre. It immediately received the approval of the Governor and the Government of India. The strategy employed for Bangalore was also used at Rampur. A senior conservator from ICI Lucknow was transferred to Rampur to look after the centre and train local staff. Some equipment was also transferred from ICI. It is now well equipped, several persons have been trained and the work of restoration of the manuscripts and paintings of Rampur Raza Library is proceeding smoothly.

This was the first time we had collaborated in the running of a centre. So far we had been content with rendering advice on the establishment of conservation centres, but the progress of the Rampur centre provided a real insight into the psychology of centre-building. We now know why several institutions to whom we had rendered valuable advice did not, or could not, set up a functional conservation laboratory. Possibly some of them lacked confidence. At Rampur, this confidence was generated by ICI, with the presence of a senior conservator and frequent visits by the chief conservator.

Our next partnership was with the Mehrangarh Museum Trust, leading to the establishment of a new

institution in 1996. It specialises in the conservation of wall paintings. As at Rampur and Bangalore, trained personnel have been seconded from ICI, Lucknow.

It is interesting how one's thoughts and priorities change. I now think that conservation should have some goal. By itself it has no meaning. Earlier, like other conservators, I too was of the view that if an art object could be conserved, it was enough. Even if the object remained in the vaults for eternity, it did not matter. Now, with several decades of experience behind me, I believe that unless the object can be put on display, it is like money locked in a bank but never used. If there is any danger to the objects, it is a challenge the conservator should be able to meet. I am not advocating unlimited exposure, only occasional exhibition under controlled conditions. This idea needs to be carefully considered.

Equally crucial is the need for all-round development of museums where the art objects are stored and used for study and exhibitions. These institutions must be reorganised in a manner that they perform the functions expected of them to fulfil their social obligation. At INTACH, we conducted a survey of museums to assess their functional status so as to propose action plans for each of them. Some states like Orissa and U.P. have already started implementing the suggestions.

With all that has been done in the government sector and by INTACH in the NGO sector, one may ask: what is the status of conservation in India? To this is related the importance we attach to our heritage. Do we want our cultural heritage to live or slowly disappear? At the present moment, the signs are positive. I hope that they will continue to remain so.

# Ploughing a lonely furrow

RUPIKA CHAWLA

AS a conservator of paintings I often confront the confusion that arises among people when I introduce myself. Perhaps, this is only natural, as conservation is a little-known field. Most of the time 'conservator of paintings' draws a blank, as conservation is usually linked to wildlife and nature in the popular imagination. I then alter my usage and say 'restorer of paintings', upon which brows clear and comprehension dawns. Unfortunately, I am then confronted with the word that laymen link with restoration—repainting. Alas! Repainting is what a painter does, depending on technique and method of application. He/she will re(paint) to achieve a certain desired effect, or to correct a mistake which needs to be obliterated.

A restorer on the other hand cleans, stabilizes and brings back to health a damaged or deteriorated work of art. The restorer, who has today emerged as a more complete conservator, is scientifically attuned in discipline and attitude to the materials used and in the methods of examination and practical work. Respect for the authenticity of a work of art—the materials that have been used in its making, its history and its physical appearance—is required.

While a conservator does not 'repaint' he/she retouches, which means the filling and colouring of lost area. Given the range of words starting with the prefix 're' it may be relevant to relate an incident regarding Satish Gujral, the painter. On his return

from Mexico in 1959 he stopped in Paris where he met an old friend from India. Gujral informed him that he had been to Mexico to study art. The friend proudly declared that he had studied restoration in Paris. 'So what!' said Gujral, 'I also restore. I make a painting, I store it. I take it out, I restore it.'

**A**s a science and profession conservation is barely acknowledged in India, though globally its role has great significance. Its antecedents go back about two centuries to developments and changes that took place in Europe at the time.

The 18th and 19th centuries were linked to archaeological activity in Egypt, Italy and Greece. The methods of restoration then used could not halt the deterioration of many archaeological finds. To make things worse, pollution was on the increase in industrialised Europe. Around this time public museums emerged as receptacles of original and historic art treasure. Museums had evolved from 'cabinets of curiosities' to repositories of rare objects. Equally important in that period were the private collectors. With the establishment of museums, the entire approach to art and antiquity was formalised and made more definite.

The early 19th century saw the beginning of the movement to halt deterioration of archaeological finds. These were early days and the methods, though aimed at preservation, were empirical and destructive. By 1888 the system stabilised to some extent. Knowledge about the nature of archaeological materials – clay, stone, wood or metal became crucial. It also became important to research the causes of decay, before and after excavation. An analysis of the reasons for the deterioration of an art object holds the key to modern conservation. It is essential to understand whether the causes are environmental, struc-

tural, related to human negligence or whether there is something intrinsically wrong with the material.

It was only natural that art and science had to combine to sort out the many problems that had emerged. Radiography was discovered by Wilhelm Roentgen in 1895, revolutionizing medical investigation. It also made possible a greater understanding of what lay behind the top coat of the paint. The pigment industry made rapid progress, adding a wide range of colours for artists. Chrome yellow appeared in 1820, cadmium yellow in 1817, cobalt yellow in 1861, viridian in 1838. Other colours were to follow, a large exciting range, enabling the impressionist painters to toss bright tubes into their bags and saunter outdoors to paint nature.

**I**n 1944 the Istituto Centrale del Restauro opened in Rome, acquiring seminal importance after the war in 1947. Italy had to put together the shattered remains of priceless murals damaged by bombs. This period perhaps signals the end of non-scientific restoration where work was carried out without focusing on the nature of a problem or the nature of the material. Only a few years earlier, Cecconi-Principe, a teacher at the institute had startled students by pouring alcohol on a small panel painting, setting it on fire and letting it burn until he judged the time was right to extinguish it. He told the class that the old varnish was weakened by what he had done and gently rubbed it off with great ease. In today's context such an attitude, or a dare-devil approach, would be seen as truly reprehensible.

What is the status of conservation in India as we head towards the end of the 20th century? To answer this question we need to pursue two lines of enquiry: conservation as understood by quasi-conservators,

'restorers' in government institutions, art dealers, painters, architects and impresarios looking for the main chance and a quick buck. These people sully the reputation of the few authentic professionals in the country. The second thought process pushes us in the direction of diagnosing the mindset of Indians who treat their heritage with scant regard.

**C**onservation relies on a heavy dose of theory and practical training, which ideally should be for three years followed by a year's internship. A student trainee is expected to assimilate the history of art and architecture, theory of colours, techniques, methods and materials used in all art forms. He must know chemistry, the theory of light, the different rays used for investigation, and must be familiar with scientifically developed consolidants and synthetic resins, their systematic usage, the role of the environment in the deterioration of objects, and have the experience to put it all into practice. Like all professions, it is bound by strong codes of conduct. Most quasi-conservators and chemists working in government institutions pick up things as they go along or inherit antiquated practices, where either a holistic view or ethical practice is at a premium.

Art dealers over-paint and patch up paintings, cover them with dark varnish, hide defects and problems, seal the painting back and front, and sell them to innocent buyers who are seduced by the 'mellow' look of the work. The original painting, screaming for discovery, lies stifled inside. For decades now, painters have done almost the same thing to their own works. Art collectors have for long taken cracked or damaged paintings back to the painter who repaints the trouble spots or, perhaps in a moment of inspiration, changes the

image as well. The actual problem lies within the layers, waiting to emerge again.

For the last few years now, it has been a source of great delight for me to receive paintings from the artists themselves. It signals realisation that the two activities are very distinct though united: a painter paints and cannot do the other, a conservator conserves and should not do the other. Take for instance, the role of architects in building conservation. Like painters they are equipped to create something new but not to handle conservation of built heritage. This requires a completely different expertise which is the domain of the architectural conservator. Unfortunately, such a professional is rebuffed by the architect as unnecessary, repudiated by the archaeologists as irrelevant.

**A**rchaeologists claim they can do it all. Recently, a director general of the Archaeological Survey of India stated that their archaeologists and chemists were competent to handle everything and did not require any architectural conservation. Somewhere between these sets of people is the impresario who too has no time nor need for the conservator. These impresarios work inexpensively, putting their faith in masons, hired labour and the traditional artisan. Such artisans, whose knowledge no doubt should be assimilated into scientific conservation, cannot and should not be allowed to function on their own. They too, like the painter and the architect, show scant respect to the integrity of the work, to its physical appearance, its structure, its layers, its history and its authenticity.

The disjunction with professionals occurs because they say things that no one wants to hear, they fuss endlessly, they discuss ethics *ad nauseam* and are such kill-joys. As a

tribe, professionals are not likely to grow rapidly since the one and only institute teaching conservation has suffered an abysmal decline. The Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Museumology founded as a deemed university by Laxmi Sihare in the late eighties has deteriorated over the last eight years. No government policy has checked the malaise, since conservation enjoys no importance among people who have little respect for their heritage.

**M**any of the students are of a low academic calibre since the bright ones stay away as the government cannot assure them jobs. No jobs? With over 400 museums in the country, we do not have a single conservator worth the name! Some years ago it was suggested that the Department of Culture create a post or two in strategic museums each year to accommodate deserving graduates. Nothing has been heard since.

The School of Planning and Architecture is the only institution which trains students in architectural conservation. It attempts to impart to students the need for a holistic approach to Indian heritage, so that later, once in the field, they look at the architectural, anthropological and environmental factors before intervening in their reconstruction.

A little of how India deals with problems of conservation may be recalled. Palaces and aristocratic homes have for long accumulated *objets d'art*. Take paintings as an example. It must be realised that they naturally deteriorate with time, in the manner that all things which are created do. The causes could be many: damp walls, dark rooms, monsoon leakages—all leading to mould growth on paintings. Canvasses tear on being moved around or stored carelessly. Environmental, technical and mainte-

nance factors become an important index of preservation.

For over a hundred years now, the anticipated reaction from collectors with stricken paintings has been to call on an artist for help. He comes along with dark oil paints and haphazardly covers the troubled areas with opaque blobs of colours. Fungus growth, tears, holes, cracks and flaking have for decades received the same 'treatment'. This insensitive, non-scientific approach to replicate the artists' original intention, which is considered sacrosanct, ruins most paintings. Such eclipsing of the original paint alters the context of the painting, distorts the painter's work and style, and leads to historical misinterpretations of art. Glaring examples of ugly blotches covering original paintings can be found in the Ravi Varma Gallery in the Srichitra Art Gallery in Thiruvananthapuram. This museum is not the only one displaying such works; museums all over India display a similar pattern.

**I**n fact, our museum culture is itself inadequate and unaware of professional standards. Conservation and museumology have yet to be understood by its guardians—the civil servants who decide policy, or even by the public. Visitors to galleries and museums, such as those mentioned above, will not find much amiss with the paintings on view. There is no way for them to know what a work should actually reflect; there is no system of instruction, no method of comparison.

Much of the same malaise can be seen with the 'restoration' work on built heritage. Cement and mortar is applied wherever cracks and losses appear, covering the original facade. Problematic murals get whitewashed, obliterated, dispensed with. Cracked marble blocks are removed as happened at the Taj Mahal, to be replaced

by new Makrana marble. What is central is originality; repairing a cracked marble is therefore imperative. Replacing alters everything.

City planning provides its own callous instances of the savaging of built heritage, which in other countries is considered invaluable and precious. The Siri Fort area in Delhi was destroyed to accommodate the Asian Games Village; Sadhana Enclave was built on the *chhatris* and other levelled remains of Jehanpanah, the 14th century capital of Mohammad bin Tughlak. The Hauz Rani tank of the 12th century was razed to the ground by the Delhi Development Authority in order to accommodate the Saket sports complex in 1989. It was meant to commemorate Jawaharlal Nehru's birth centenary, who ironically, had shown great concern for the preservation of monuments. He had taken abundant precaution in protecting them during the formulation of the first master plan.

**A** past testifies to other cultures and explains to us what we are today. There is certainly little which has been built in the past 50 years which fills us with a sense of awe and pride of the kind our ancient monuments evoke. It is not the buildings of the five decades which bring travellers to our country, but the monuments of the past. We seem to be equally unaware of the economic leverage that our built heritage can provide and therefore of the need to safeguard it. There is no time to be lost; the time bomb is ticking and the past will not always wait patiently.

The historic evolution of scientific conservation elucidated earlier in the article was necessary to demonstrate what is required and why it does not exist in India. Is there something in our mindset which is indifferent to the value of the past? Do we philosophically believe that all things dis-

appear as we ourselves do, annihilated into nothingness, the way of all flesh?

The notion of *karma* that plays within all of us can lead us into thinking that God's will is of utmost importance, that there is no necessity for us to interfere. Maybe that is why we shrug our shoulders and shrug off our treasures, allowing the winds of change to do what they will. Moreover, we further argue, in a country assailed by so many problems, why should a few ruins and old temples matter?

**A**s a nation we are obsessed with icons and deities. The imperfect and the incomplete trouble us. A deity is worshipped because it is *purnam*, complete. It is deconsecrated when it is *binnam*, defective. The concept of restoration is therefore absent. Since we see art as disposable, parts of our ritual have been based on the same thought. Creation, destruction and creation again has been an inherent principle with us. A cracked terracotta pot is replaced, the daily morning *rangoli* scattered, only to be made again. Months of preparation create Durga and Ganapati idols which are then ritualistically drowned, to disappear forever. Where is the concept of restoration?

Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, Shiva the Destroyer. What Shiva destroys of what Brahma creates is mere decayed and decadent matter which must be removed. We have to learn to think clearly and scientifically and while accepting the beauty and reality of tradition, accept the fact that there is more than just that. A noble past needs to be protected and understood in all its anthropological complexity and its economic possibilities. It is neither decaying nor decadent but just seriously unwell, needing to be brought back to health and beauty. May Vishnu the Preserver prevail.

# A painter of visions

JYOTIRMAYA SHARMA

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy felt that a true civilization valued human beings more than things. To be civilized was to possess the capacity to discriminate, to judge. It also consisted of a certain quality of recollectedness or detachment. Civilization was necessarily a view of life that was balanced, where the place of values was not ambiguous. This in turn required stillness of mind and body, the need for self-reflective repose. It was imperative, therefore, for any idea of civilization to cherish a non-instrumental view of life, that is, where people's interests or sense of agency were not entirely directed towards utilitarian goals. Hence, any view of life that believed in multiplying the quantity of desires rather than in the refinement of their quality was no civilization at all.

For Coomaraswamy the question 'What is civilization?' was not an exploration into philosophical abstractions. The full force of the question emerges when the question is rephrased as, 'What is it to be civilized?' In one sense, posing the problem regarding the meaning and possibilities of civilization helped Coomaraswamy to restate first principles and evolve clarity regarding the constellation of values in which we operate. Once these operative first

principles were established, then, whether it was his intervention in the nationalist movement or his interpretation of Indian art or even his metaphysical excursions, Coomaraswamy returned constantly to the all important question of civilization. It was to remain a refrain in all his writings.

Another question that remained central to Coomaraswamy was that of tradition. History was not tradition, and conversely tradition was not history. Nor was tradition a Spenglerian cultural prison that condemned one to a purblind worship of the past. Tradition helps us to know *how to see* and *what to see*. In other words, tradition imparted vision and perspective. This helped an individual to integrate in the life of the community and possess symbols (including language) that were culturally evocative.

Coomaraswamy recognised that certain strands of tradition may have become obsolete and had to be abandoned. In one sense, the transformation was brought about by western modernity. Tradition, when truly inspired, rejects ambition, competition and quantitative standards. Western modernity, in contrast, built itself on the foundation of notions of social advancement, free enterprise and production in quantity: man's needs and desires were constantly multiplied by

advertisement and greed. Further, political and economic goals had become much more important.

**A** rejection of tradition in favour of modernity, however, had led to forms of self-hatred, lack of compassion, and a deep sense of inferiority. Coomaraswamy clearly had the degeneration of India under British rule in mind when he speaks of the rupture caused by modernity. The solution for him, however, does not lie entirely in either the political goal of seizing power or in imitating Europe; nor does it help in aspiring to a mindless return to the past.

A renunciation of what appears to be obsolete is justified; political and economic problems cannot be ignored; man and man's world are still to be explored; but with all that there has been too little love, too much of snobbism, too indiscriminate a taste, too little distaste.... For a moment, perhaps, we desired to turn back the hands of the clock, but that was only sentimentality, and it was not long before we remembered that fresh waters are ever flowing in upon us. We have learnt that we are exiled; but we would not and cannot return. In India, as in Europe, the vestiges of ancient civilization must be renounced: we are called from the past and must make our home in the future. *But to understand, to endorse with passionate conviction what we have left behind us is the only possible foundation for power.* ('Young India', *The Dance of Shiva*, p. 171-77; italics mine)

In short, politically and economically free India, but with the soul of Europe was not an ideal to be dreamt of, or to live and die for.

Before going on to consider Coomaraswamy's prescription for regeneration of India in terms of understanding and endorsing 'what

we have left behind us', two important aspects of his thought need careful delineation. First, his evaluation and critique of modernity as embodied in European models of science and technology; and second, the place of foreign ideas in the context of India.

Modernity, according to Coomaraswamy, is usually satisfied with imitations. It places imitative dexterity and novelty above the power of great invention and nobility of symbolism. Modernity has its own illusions and superstitions. The modern superstition is the superstition of facts. This is far more dangerous than any superstition of the imagination; modernity assumes the superiority of the soul on the mere grounds of increased empirical knowledge. It places greater faith in the senses than in the wisdom of intuition. It confuses outward signs of material prosperity with civilization itself. In spirit, Coomaraswamy belongs to a strand of nineteenth century thought that rejected the uniformitarianism of the Enlightenment, with its cult of universalism, rationalism and empiricism.

**T**here is no wholesale rejection, however, of European science and technology as demonic in Coomaraswamy's thought. Machinery need not be abandoned in favour of culture. A civilization must be in a position to strike a balance and reasonable division of labour between man and machine. The problem with excessive machinery is that it does the essentially human part of the work, and in consequence stifles spontaneity, freedom and imagination. The place of machinery in a true civilization should be that of a servant, and not a master. If a reversal of this rule takes place, we are condemned to an aesthetically and spiritually inferior environment.

It does not help, Coomaraswamy feels, to paint modern indus-

trial civilization as particularly diabolical—a *diabolus ex machina*. To do so would be an admission of the ineffectiveness and impotence of a community. It would indicate a lack of will and acceptance of the status of epigoni on the part of a civilization. In turn, there was nothing wrong in assimilating or adopting foreign ideas and customs as long as this did not entail mindless imitation.

For it is not deep acquaintance with European culture that denationalised man in Asia but an imperfect and servile apprehension of it. Those who understand the culture of others find in it a stimulus not to imitation but to creation. Those who do not understand become intellectual parasites. ('Poems of Rabindranath Tagore', in *Art and Swadeshi*, p. 102)

**C**oomaraswamy was emphatic that the regeneration of India could be achieved through art, and not by politics and economics alone. It was important to make the lives of people and the environment in which they lived as beautiful as possible. Beauty was as essential as the existence of a moral order.

[I]n fact that without beauty there can be no true morality, without morality no true beauty. ('Art and Swadeshi', in *Art and Swadeshi*, p. 3)

When art and morality complement each other, true swadeshi emerges. For it is in a fundamental sense a way of looking at life; it is learning once again the art of living. It is sincerity and the rediscovery of our ancient civilization, which was at once industrial and spiritual. It is only by revival of the artistic faculties of the people that a sense of the practical and power of organisation can be infused.

The loss of the traditional art of India was in a way a loss of the sense

of community. When a craft dies, it is not only a loss of wealth for the nation, but also a loss of wealth in the shape of human quality and community life. This leads to several ills such as child labour and work under mechanical and unhealthy conditions. What was significant about the traditional art and crafts of India was that in Indian homes, whether rich or poor, there could be found things both useful and beautiful. Arts and craft were once closely linked with the daily needs of the people, domestic and ceremonial. Anglicization of India had destroyed the beauty and romance of India's heritage.

**I**t was, however, unwise to expect the British government (or any government, as a matter of fact) to revive Indian art and traditional industries. This task had to be undertaken by the people themselves. Coomaraswamy feels that once a community becomes self-sufficient and self-possessed, political rights follow as a matter of course. Thus, swadeshi has to be more than a political ideal: it must be a spiritual-artistic ideal. The reasons for the degeneration of India; therefore, can be located primarily in Indian indifference to its own artisans and craftsmen.

We ourselves have despised and hated everything Indian and it is by that hatred that we have destroyed our industries and degenerated the status of our artisans. ('Swadeshi, True and False', in *Art and Swadeshi*, p. 9)

The artist, and not the politician, should, therefore, be the real emancipator of India. Politics is necessarily based on a hatred of the 'other'. Ideas of victimhood, self-pity or violence are an integral part of any political goal. Representative government, as seen in Europe, was no more than the victory of the most powerful interests.

For Coomaraswamy, every oppressed nationality oppresses some other or embraces the oppression of class by class. He feels that patriotism is often coloured in narrow and sectarian shades. One's loyalty should be to life itself, not just Indian life.

**T**he artist should be a very important pillar of the body politic, feels Coomaraswamy. Here, his approval of the humanism of the *Bhakti* movement becomes significant. It represented for him a humanism which contained within itself a philosophy of action, a constant glorification of life, a delight in sensuous symbolism and a consecration of humanity.

The pure politician is often no nationalist at all, in an idealistic sense. It is the work of poets (poet, painter, sculptor, musician, artist – all these are synonyms) to make their hearers free: it is they alone who establish the status of nations. ('Poems of Rabindranath Tagore', in *Art and Swadeshi*, p. 102)

Further, Coomaraswamy makes clear his disapproval of severe, dry, self-denying intellectualism, a feature he felt certain schools of Indian philosophy as well as modern science shared. What mattered much more were little things rather than grand abstractions or designs.

The painters of our visions – the makers of our songs – the builders of our houses – the weavers of our garments, these all are touchstone that can turn to gold for us both past and present, if we will it so.... They can show to us the significance of little things, the wonder of what is always going on. They tell us that we are what we are not because of knowledge or wealth or power, but because of the dolls in our childhood's games, because of the rivers that we worship as divinities, because of the beauty of women,

and the splendid indifference of men to danger and death. ('Poems of Rabindranath Tagore', in *Art and Swadeshi*, p. 105)

It is often alleged that Coomaraswamy, the historian of India's traditional art and culture, was greater than Coomaraswamy, the social philosopher. Yet, all aspects of Coomaraswamy's work have a coherence and unity that is inseparable. It is this that made him not merely an interpreter or classifier of Indian art: it made him look into the 'generative roots of art' (K.G. Subramanyan's phrase).

**F**or him, Indian art was essentially religious in content; not dogmatic, but ever concerned with reality. To understand art was to look into the meaning of that art and the thought from which it had sprung. It was crucial, therefore, to understand Indian mysticism and ideals of life. In short, to understand Indian art (or any other art) is to take cognisance of the mental atmosphere in which it grew. Thus, for the artist in India, mysticism, the sense of the unity of life, was inseparable from the delight in all sensuous beauty.

Indian art, therefore, did not aim at the reproduction of the facts of nature: the relation between art and nature was not one of art imitating nature, but bringing about harmony between art and nature. Indian art aims at suggestion; selection, emphasis; design; it expresses the realities of life subjectively. It is creative and living.

To generalise, whatever object may be the artist's chosen or appointed theme becomes for the time being the single object of his attention and devotion; and only when the theme has thus become for him an immediate experience can it be stated authoritatively from knowledge. ('The Theory of Art in Asia', in *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 4)



# Books

**INDIA'S CULTURE: The State, the Arts and Beyond** by B.P. Singh. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

INDIA boasts of a developed culture, but is saddled with a developing economy. This is the context in which B.P. Singh – civil servant and author – examines the interaction between the Indian state and culture, both in the past and the present, and the prospects of cultural development in the new millennium.

While in the first chapter the author traverses the familiar ground of India's past culture, and in the second discusses the role of the state and market in its development, he provides us with the most valuable information in the third chapter where he talks about the unfolding of the cultural policy of independent India immediately after 1947. Those were the days when the country was fortunate enough to have a few leaders who had been brought up with civilized values and were sensitive to the arts.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (the first Minister of Education) were two among them. The author narrates how between the two, they laid the foundations of the cultural institutions and activities that have today spread far and wide in India and earned fame abroad. Azad was reported to have said at that time: '...in a democratic regime, the arts can derive their sustenance only from the people, and the state – as the organized manifestation of the people's will – must, therefore, undertake its maintenance and development as one of its first responsibilities.'

The author, in this connection, cites an interesting incident from the Nehru-Azad era, as revealed in a series of official correspondence. In June 1948, Nehru recommended to Azad the purchase of eight paintings by two Hungarian artists, Sass Brunner and her daughter Elizabeth, on behalf of the government, for

Rs 15,000. Azad agreed with the officials in his ministry that the paintings should first be evaluated by experts before purchase. Two experts (who were told that the paintings were chosen by Nehru) evaluated them and dismissed them as mediocre, saying that they did not deserve more than Rs 500 a piece.

Nehru was naturally upset, since he had already made a commitment to the Hungarian artists. He offered to buy the paintings himself at the stated price, if the government could not acquire them. He also suggested that no fresh purchases should be made, and only those paintings should be bought in regard to which commitments had been made. Ultimately, a compromise of sorts was arrived at.

The Finance Ministry, in an oblique warning against Nehru's precipitate action, issued a general instruction saying that in future it would be necessary to obtain its clearance before any commitment was made on behalf of the government regarding purchase of pictures and paintings. Although Azad finally sanctioned the payment of the original amount that Nehru had promised to pay the two Brunners, the incident from beginning to end reveals a particular disposition that prevailed among ministers, bureaucrats as well as art-experts in those days.

They tended to adhere to the principle of accountability, aesthetic standards, correct procedures and certain moral values – qualities which have disappeared from the decision-making process in today's cultural scene. No bureaucrat today would dare to question a prime minister's choice of paintings and submit them to scrutiny by experts. No art expert would have the guts to reject them on artistic grounds. No prime minister would have the humility to offer to buy those rejected paintings of his choice from his own pocket, since he is promise-bound to the painters. They are all collaborating today in the dismantling of the old cultural scene, replacing it with one dominated by amoral

philistine politicians of the Laloo-Kesri-Mulayam brand, or the Navalkar-type cultural commissars of the 'saffron brigade'.

The changes in the attitudes and behavioural patterns in the cultural scene over the last 50 years worry the author as he watches the slow degeneration of the once prestigious Akademies, some of which are enmeshed in allegations of financial irregularities, nepotism and gross misuse of government funds. But Singh still prefers the original Nehruvian policy of retaining the autonomous character of the Akademies over the bureaucratic temptation to bring them under tighter official control.

This brings us to the larger issue of the state's role in the Indian cultural scene. Singh believes in the 'guiding philosophy' of the Indian state laid down 50 years ago which, according to him, rules that, 'It is not for the state to guide culture but only to provide an environment which would facilitate dialogue among creative persons and encourage freedom of their expression' (p. xiii) – a principle with which I fully agree. It is this 'guiding philosophy' which is being violated by the present Indian government, when its BJP ministers publicly announce their plans to guide culture according to their philosophy of 'one nation, one culture and one people', which is clearly aimed at homogenizing the cultural plurality of India (to which Singh devotes one major section in his book) under the hegemony of one uniform (ersatz Hindu) culture.

The other threat to Indian culture comes from the market in an era of liberalization and globalization when art and artists are being increasingly controlled by market forces through their sponsorship by the corporate sector. This may lead to a future where, according to Singh, 'The relationship between art and society will shift from the existing creative interface, in which the artist is moved by deep values and commitments, to that of the increasingly institutionalized sets of contracts and salesmanship.'

But, unlike many other prophets of doom, Singh discovers signs of conservation, renewal and revival of Indian culture in two developments: first, the increasingly important role played by artists and creative persons in Indian society, and second, the new awareness of rights and responsibilities by the struggling backward sections who, he hopes, will provide a new dimension to the cultural dynamics of India of the future. This hope is based on his theory that while in the post-Cold War era the market prevails over military strength as the primary index of power, in the new millennium, culture will emerge as an alternative

source of power to challenge both. One sincerely wishes that his hope comes true.

Sumanta Banerjee

#### **BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY:**

**India's Search for Identity** edited by Fred Dallmayr and Ganesh Devi. Sage, Delhi, 1998.

AFTER Dag Hammarskjöld's death, the manuscript of *Vagmarken* (Markings) was found in his house together with an undated letter to his friend, Leif Belfrage. One statement is noteworthy. Talking about his diary, Hammarskjöld remarked, 'These entries provide the only true "profile" that can be drawn.'

When the diary was readied for publication, the poet W.H. Auden, who had been invited to contribute a Foreword, wrote: 'Had the responsibility for the decision to publish the diary been mine, I should have been inclined to omit his covering letter to Leif Belfrage on account of one sentence in it which seems to me both false and misleading: "These entries give the only correct profile that can be drawn."... No man can draw his own "profile" correctly because, as Thoreau said: "It is as hard to see oneself as to look backwards without turning around." The truth is that our friends – and our enemies – always know us better than we know ourselves.'

A search for true identity is an unending one. Human beings have often been compared to onions – peel away a layer and you encounter another, both similar and different to the one discarded. At the end, all one is left with is a lingering smell, and tears in the eye.

What is true of individuals, is even more so for societies. Even if a society sees itself as a civilization with a defined core, what this essence is, who defines and certifies it, and what use this definition/self-definition is put to, is more a reflection of contending ideas and ideologies than any epistemic truth. This tension is most marked in a civilizational culture in transition like India, 'where cultural memories have been preserved with more loyalty and steadfastness than almost anywhere in the world. The beginnings of Indian life are coeval with the birth of human civilization as such, and ensuing centuries and millennia have witnessed not so much radical reversals as a process of accretion and a steady proliferation of cultural strands.'

It is equally true that the Indian sub-continent has been touched pervasively, perhaps more than other parts of Asia, by the inroads of western colonialism and political-economic hegemony. It is this conflict of

tradition and modernity, as reflected in India's encounter with the West, which forms the subject matter of the anthology under review.

Not that such an exercise is a particularly original one. There is no shortage of scholarly studies on the theme. What, however, has been less explored are the existential dimensions of this encounter, 'its role as a catalyst in a process of self-scrutiny and in the search for self-rule and cultural identity.' As such, the narrative presented 'represents not an objective travelogue but a sentimental journey as experienced by leading participants in the encounter.'

Part of the problematic has been framed by a concern that the Indian self-image has been shaped, if not constructed, by the westerner's image of India and the Indians. As a challenge to the western privilege to investigate, understand, and come to know the 'other', this anthology explores Indian perceptions and interpretations of the West, 'perceptions which inevitably were linked with, or rebounded on, modes of Indian self-understanding and self-definition.'

As in any other old civilization, the encounter was as much cultural as political and economic. Readers may possibly be familiar with John Keay's *India Discovered*, a book which traces the varying and growing appreciation of Indian culture by the English. Their early reactions moved from open-eyed amazement to dismay, from India as a fabled land of riches to one of a dark continent. It was only much later that there grew an appreciation of an ancient civilization in all its complexity.

The Indian journey follows a similar trajectory, from an uncritical adulation of all that is western to a near pathological defence of our ancient greatness – and the myriad shades in between. Dallmayr and Devi, following the Bhikhu Parekh four-fold classification of tradition, modernity, critical traditionalism and critical modernity, select for representation two sets of Indian intellectuals and leaders – one responding to colonialism and the latter to modernization.

The first set of thinkers – from Swami Vivekananda to Jawaharlal Nehru – encompassing Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Coomaraswamy, Savarkar, Krishnamurthy, M.N. Roy, Ambedkar, Iqbal, Azad and Gandhi – brilliantly capture the remarkably flexible, differentiated and open-ended conception of Indian identity. Those enamoured of an Indian essentialism (read Hindutva) would gain from this expression untainted by chauvinistic arrogance and self-indulgence. Yes, the tensions between not just the traditionalists and modernists, but even their critical

variants were marked. Even those who advocated similar policies and institutions did so for very different reasons. While the critical traditionalists, *a la* Vivekananda, sought to eliminate what they saw as evil, the critical modernists sought to preserve what they saw as valuable.

This collection also helps in understanding the different strands of what today has become a defining problem – communalism. Each of the 12 thinkers, Hindu, Muslim and agnostic (M.N. Roy, Nehru), can be seen as a legitimate forbear to the current arguments on true and pseudo secularism, on the role of religion in civic life. Interestingly, even Savarkar, seen as the father of Hindutva, remained a non-believer in personal life, as also an unremitting opponent of a theocratic state.

The second part of the book, also comprising of 12 essays, is somewhat less eclectic, veering more towards the editors' personal predilection – critical traditionalism. It does, however, have the merit of political correctness – two of the essays are by women scholars. What makes this set come alive is the essay by U.R. Anantha Murthy, 'Why Not Worship in the Nude'. Alongside the extract from Sudhir Chandra's *The Oppressive Present*, it foregrounds the ambivalence that the middle class, urban, male, part westernised Indian suffers about himself and his society. Without falling into the trap of post-modernist relativism, it reflects the tensions in exercising an ethical choice when encountering beliefs different from one's own. Anantha Murthy's personal choice seems clear; he is merely hesitant about passing a judgement on others.

The golden jubilee of Indian independence, now drawing to a close, has resulted in many an offering. Most are critical, evaluative assessments of the post-independence Indian enterprise. The merit of this exercise is that it makes us more aware of our longer intellectual history. I also believe that it will better equip us to confront the different essentialisms parading as truth. It may even help us acquire a greater degree of reflexivity and self-confidence. If so, its purpose would have been well served.

Harsh Sethi

**MODERNITY AT LARGE: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization** by Arjun Appadurai. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

MORE than two centuries ago Kant in his essay on *Aufklärung* attempted to strike a balance between public and private use of reason in the hope that one day it

would actually be accomplished. On such a hope rested the edifice of Enlightenment modernity. However, in recent times the universalist claims of modernity and its self-definition appear jaded and incoherent.

There are various vantage points from which modernity is interrogated today. Central to the interrogation of 'western modernity' is the proposition that there are different modernities whose history cannot be written, as had been done in the past, as an unproblematic victory of 'reason' over 'tradition', science over superstitions and so on. This critique has become trenchant and powerful, particularly from the theoreticians of modernity's victims or subalterns. How do we understand modernity today? What has been the impact of recent changes on modernity? Have we entered a distinct phase or era which could be called postmodern (post in the sense of after)? What does modernity mean for people once colonised? How do the modernities at different places the world over look like today?

Arjun Appadurai's book attempts both to frame as well as answer some of these questions. He attempts to build his arguments through the explorations of themes such as cricket in the Indian subcontinent, the centrality of counting in the colonial imagination, autobiographical fragments, and contours of national and postnational imaginary. However, the main focus of his work rests on the understanding of modernities at the present conjuncture, what he calls the 'here and now'.

For many, 'globalization' (interpreted in an evolutionist fashion) captures the essence of our changing times. But for the author, the present conjuncture is conceived in terms of breaks or ruptures. The changing nature of media and migration have become the cause as well as the consequence of the ruptures. The expansion of electronic media and the growing movement of people across the world, according to Appadurai, have transformed the ways in which people conceive their subjectivities and political imaginings.

In the first section of the book the author invites us to see the implications of a rapidly changing world of anthropology and cultural studies. If the world has become truly global then our understanding of territoriality, of academic disciplines, as the author rightly argues, is bound to change. This in turn implies that our 'methodological gestures' should also adapt to these changes. For instance, the phenomenon of consumerism can neither be understood exclusively within the confines of a given, bounded territory of a society

nor, with the help of state-centric methodology. At the centre of Appadurai's understanding of globalization lies the process of contestation, conflict and complex negotiations in and across societies.

The chapter on Indian cricket highlights this well. This is primarily a story of the indigenization of Indian cricket. However, this process was particularly complex. First, the colonial context inextricably linked Indian cricket to the politics of empire and then to the assertive world of nationalism; and second, the appropriation of cricket (its 'hard' cultural form as the author puts it) involved not merely knowing the rules but breaking and reinterpreting the link between the game and its embodied values. If cricket is a 'hard' cultural form then how did it change and become a source of so much passion in the Indian subcontinent? How did Victorian values, the Britishness, so strongly associated with cricket, get disentangled?

According to the author the indigenization of cricket in the subcontinent was a product of 'collective and spectacular experiments with modernity.' Beginning with the colonial officials, the little *rajahs*, and the indigenous religious communities, cricket gradually moved into the realm of a growing nationalist imaginary. Cricket, like so many other practices, showed to the nationalists the unacceptable face of colonialism and generated among the colonised a desire to beat the colonisers at their own game. Playing the game, however, involved learning the codes, rules and associated values. It was the colonial context that made this learning or imbibing the rules an ambivalent affair. Appadurai has indeed captured this ambivalence well. How did it all happen? Was it the vernacularization of cricket, combined with the expansion of media, which caused this 'hard cultural form' to melt?

There is no doubt that the media, both print and electronic, played a crucial role in this process. However, the proposition that it was through the media that people came to know cricketing codes which led to the popularity of the game does not carry much weight. It is perhaps plausible that a series of events or changes such as the decline of Indian hockey, the victory in World Cup cricket in 1983, and the expansion of electronic media during and after the Asian games of 1982, contributed to the changing status of cricket in India. Equally, I am not sure if the conversation between a Hindi commentator and Lala Amarnath, as suggested by the author, projects the hybridity of language and hazards of its use. To use the inadequacy of an ill-informed commentator to make a larger argument seems to me to be stretching the point too far.

The popularity of cricket in the country does not mean that an ordinary, but passionate, lover of the game knows the difference between a googly and a chinaman. The real consequence and index of vernacularization of cricket in India is that, for the ordinary spectators, the game has finally been wrenched away from its Victorian roots. Cricket has truly become a game of the soil. In this transformation, as the author rightly points out, the indigenization of patronage, state support and commercial interests have played a significant role. Finally, cricket's capacity to rouse passion is based on its ability to experiment with what Appadurai calls the 'means of modernity'.

Modernity is not merely about control and subjugation. It is also about contestation and coping. Appadurai has shown how, through an understanding of the colonial state's policy of classification and enumeration, the project of colonialism and the opposition it faced from the colonial subjects was imbricated. The colonial state's orientalist gaze was to a large extent responsible for creating new discourses on community. However, the implications of such discourses were not fully under its control. They moved in various uncharted directions and shaped the subjectivities of the colonised, which in turn gave rise to mobilizational politics of several kinds.

An understanding of mobilizational politics, both ethnic and national, constitutes the subject matter of the last three chapters of the book. Appadurai's insights are truly incisive and his suggestions full of theoretical possibilities. His critique of primordial understanding of ethnic mobilization is all too familiar. However, his use of the metaphor of 'implosion' to capture the ethnic mobilization in recent times is extremely useful. The role of migration and the global reach of the media, according to him, has transformed the older form of ethnic politics, once territorial and anchored within the nation, to a mobilization which is fluid, shifting and diasporic.

The most provocative part of the argument lies in his prognosis of the nation state. For some time now, scholars of globalization have talked about the decline of the nation state. Appadurai's book lifts this general understanding to a higher methodological level so that social science can devise ways of facing the new realities. One might disagree with his prediction that the nation state is on its death bed, but his invitation to ponder over post national ways of thinking and living is indeed salutary.

Not long ago, while reflecting on Kant's *Aufkklärung*, Foucault had advised that we free our-

selves from the intellectual blackmail of 'being for or against the Enlightenment'. This makes our understanding of modernities (even in its postmodern variant) adequately historical, nuanced and complex. Appadurai's work is certainly informed by this Foucauldian spirit. It is evident that this spirit will touch even those readers who do not belong to the author's discipline.

**Bishnu Mohapatra**

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES** edited by Geeti Sen.  
Orient Longman, Delhi, 1997.

THIS book carries around two dozen articles, poems and interviews which may, at first sight, seem diffused. But the editorial purpose behind them is clear: to bring into focus the cultural heritage that Pakistan and India on the one hand, and India and Bangladesh on the other, share with each other.

This point can be made in a perfunctory way, in the sense that it is not unusual for neighbouring nations to share styles, forms and fashions. But a claim becomes serious when it refers to basic emotional amenities like language, idiom, music, poetry and sculpture. It becomes even more serious when the effort is to demonstrate that this sharing is as intense today as ever before.

It may appear unfair to reduce a broad range of essays on language, artistic patronage, theatre, painting, folk music, epics and urban milieus to a simple proposition. But it would be even more unfair to turn one's back on a conclusion that Pakistan, India and Bangladesh continue to share a large cultural continuum, and this sharing cannot be seen as a matter that belongs to history. This may be a trite proposition as long as one is commenting on cultural affairs. But the moment one formulates it in political terms, it has serious implications. It implies that the origin of the hatred across the borders lie precisely in the territory of cultural intimacy.

The one problem with discussions on cultural overlaps is their political naiveté. Discussing cultural sameness is not the same as waving a white peace flag. It could well mean exactly the opposite. Politicians across the border are the only ones who understand this and manipulate it to their advantage. As the generations that directly witnessed Partition retire from power, the unique relationships in this subcontinent are likely to unravel. After all, where in the world do we have two prime ministers who

were born in each others countries (Nawaz Sharif, I.K. Gujral).

Having said this, let us start with the intimate, personal issues. The two memoirs in the collection by Intizar Husain and Nirmal Sengupta express deep fondness for the neighbouring country. Indians visiting Pakistan, and *vice versa*, genuinely feel as if they have found the lost love of childhood. But there is a refreshingly candid piece by F.S. Aijazuddin from Pakistan who feels nauseated by an Indian who approaches him on the streets of Paris with a whining familiarity. The editor deserves to be complimented for the inclusion of this stark essay which rescues the volume from the wishy-washy euphoria of naive peace lovers. Friendships between neighbouring nations cannot be brought about by assertions of cultural sameness, but through a political will than can create a distant respect for each other. Too much hugging is rarely a correct diplomatic move.

This volume is divided into sections which make place for memoirs, literature and the arts, questions of nation-building, and of course the inevitable matter of national identity. There is a particularly rich section on music, which provides a coherent picture of folk culture on our western, as well as the eastern flanks. Rakshat Puri's article on Bulle Shah and Muchkund Dubey's account of Lalan Fakir take us to the dense interwoven cultural mosaic of the countryside, in Punjab and Bengal respectively. Both are evocative pieces which open up a huge but invisible territory of culture. Admittedly, the section on music brings out a feeling of howling, desperate intimacy across the boundaries of politics. It outlines the index of emotions which are often transformed into political hostility in the region. It is matter of relief that despite this occasional intensity, there is much in the book that a lay reader will enjoy.

This volume also provides interesting insights into the question of gender in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Salima Hashmi discusses the fate of women artists in Pakistan while Meghna Guhathakurta focuses on Bangladeshi theatre. This is probably the right moment to express disgust for our perpetual media focus on Europe and America, while we know so little about our immediate neighbours.

To conclude, this book deserves praise for its get up and lack of errors. If we can publish such books in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, we need not make bombs just to feel proud.

**Ratnakar Tripathy.**

**INDIAN MANSIONS: A Social History of the Haveli** by Sarah Tillotson. Orient Longman, Delhi, 1998.

THE traditional Indian dwelling was born out of the dual and contradictory rituals of community and privacy. The strengths of the community, its bonds of kinship, its family ties, caste and professional affiliations created requisite proximities and distances in domestic architecture. If in the village leather workers lived in enclaves separate from weavers and masons it was to maintain a wider protective and self-perpetuating network than the family could offer. They knew that if the community perished, so would the individual. In the city, community boundaries were a similar necessity in the past; but they appeared in more complex layers – habitable overlays that stemmed from intricate relationships between the urban setting and the society that inhabited it.

Sarah Tillotson's book *Indian Mansions* is a record of the life and times that created these urban settings. For sheer magnitude and mess of architectural material, there is little to upstage the history of the Indian house. Hindu and Muslim houses have been recorded all the way across the North Indian plains from Kutch to Calcutta, in vastly differing geographical terrains and cultural contexts and with a baffling variety of designs that defy easy categorization. Yet, Tillotson's book is a sanely lucid account of this architectural madness. Right at the start she admits that the only logic to analysing the material lay in discovering some common cultural thread. It is here that the exceptions begin to follow a rule, and a discovery made that the similarities between buildings lie not in their design or appearance but in the life they generate within.

It is indeed a valid, though anti-classical, approach to analysing a building's plan. In pushing architecture to the background, Tillotson's uses sociological data – the position of women in a household, recollections of those who have lived in havelis, even entries from Emperor Babur's diaries – to describe the way a house was laid out. Her concerns throughout the book, consequently, are with the architectural details and components of buildings: the *baithak*, the *gharokha*, the *chowk*, the *zenana*, the reception, the drawing room, the *tehkhanas* and other elements that emerge as a result of these cultural and historical investigations. Little of entire buildings or their urban settings makes its way into the narrative. Though compressed, the vast time span, and the variety and

historical spread of the material makes the text a heavily footed version of the subject.

The book begins 'under the cover of darkness'; the absence of light, and consequently building detail, allows Tillotson the freedom to describe the type of people that inhabited the haveli – the rich merchants of Gujarat and Rajasthan, the noblemen of the royal Mughal courts, feudal landlords and ordinary people. In so doing she brings together a range of house types – as varied as the *mohallas* of Shahjahanabad, the *pols* of Ahmedabad, the intricate *havelis* of Shekhavati and Bikaner. Inside, the simple actions of sitting and relaxing assume a variety of architectural import in differing cultural terrains. The name given to the principal sitting room is itself an indication of the importance each place attaches to it: 'The Shekhavati rooms were known simply as *baithaks* – sitting rooms; the first floor reception rooms of Rajasthan were known locally as *mahals*; Urdu speakers in Mughal cities referred to *dalans*, literally verandahs; and the great hall of feudal landowners were known as *diwankhanas* – audience halls – like their grander relations in the palaces.'

As the author points out, certain regional characteristics are also common to the courtyard houses of North India. The havelis also enclosed courtyards, a chowk, or an *angan*, within the house. This piece of appropriated ground was remade within the closure of walls and was intensively used as the setting for a whole range of daily rituals. The specific requirements of the family centered each house around its own private courtyard, a central open focus that did for it what the verandah had done for bungalow: venting the hot air and keeping the inside cool. The walls of the rooms around it were always enveloped in a pocket of shadow, cast by the high walls of the courtyard. Such a house, because of the excessive layers, did little to affect the climatic advantages that could have been achieved by orientation. And though such a heavy construction, and the building of rooms with no direct measurable function, had obvious implications of expense, the need for climatic and cultural protection necessitated this grand design.

While the need for security articulated the plan of the mansions, the house answered to family requirements in other, more familiar ways: the plan provided convenient slices of privacy. The courtyard separated the sexes – the men occupying the front rooms enjoyed the public face of the house, while the women were relegated to the background, busy in the activities of nurturing a household. Up above, the family bedrooms

and work areas functioned in a more relaxed privacy, removed from the prying eyes of the public street, and the badgering and voluble exchanges within the internal courts below. A muted light drifted through bracketed windows into this quieter and more private life. An innate resourcefulness and sense of conservation, the perpetual fear of security and the scarcity; and indeed the need for a harmonious family life, made the traditional mansion an internal cloister of habitation too complex to be considered in purely architectural terms.

In our own time, the diversity of the modern city – its varieties of family ties, economic status, peer groups and political affiliations have produced an unfortunate corollary to the traditional collective. At least in Delhi. The banding together of individuals imparts its own unmistakable public stamp of identification: journalists live in a landlocked sub-division called Press Enclave, lawyers do the same in Niti Bagh. A settlement of Punjabis creates Punjabi Bagh, Swamis band together in Swami Nagar, the Bengalis carve out their own in Chittaranjan Park. (By contrast Bangalore's more egalitarian city structure is perhaps reflected in its nameless addresses: Fourth Main, Third Cross, Seventh Road....)

In architecture the reasons for such affiliations are, of course, largely bureaucratic, and the individual – whether lawyer, Punjabi or swami – is forced into a collective in order to exercise his rights, buy land, build and live. Yet nothing of the architecture of these urban collectives reflects anything of the community that inhabits it. If the traditional city mansion attracted, it did so without giving away its secrets; the private courtyard life lay hidden behind a common vocabulary of street embellishment – carved balconies and elaborate doorways. The newer constructions of the cities, however, revel in the misconception that every house done in a personal style will produce a rich and interesting streetscape. Yet that is rarely so. The architectural expression that emerges outside ignores the architectural expression of its neighbour; a Baroque house shares a wall with a villa modelled on an Italian country house, which in turn shoves up against a Spanish hacienda. Such individualistic efforts are not only irresponsible from an urban standpoint, but reveal a superficial understanding of individuality. An ideology that encourages self-expression over cooperation, paradoxically produces an incoherent and monotonous architecture.

**Gautam Bhatia**

# Comment:

## Between warmongers and peacemakers

THERE are those who are for the bomb and those against it. They reveal themselves, as each seems to be sure of respectability. Those for rely confidently on intellectual demonstration, those against on a ready recipe of morality which demands no proof. I call the two factions warmongers and peacemakers for convenience, to identify them quickly by fixing the nature of the distortion rather than from a taste for caricature.

It is possible that those talking peace will lead us to war; that those talking war know best how to ensure peace. The warmongers may not be what they seem to be. This is often said about peacemakers; as they have been seen occasionally to lead to disaster, mostly through appeasement. We need the bomb, or the ability to use nuclear energy, for defence. The fault of the warmongers is that they do not explain why. They think everyone knows, and incomprehension grows by the day, along with hardening suspicion of bad faith or of congenital belligerence.

The words in use do not facilitate comprehension and feed debate. An example is deterrence. This is rarely explained.<sup>1</sup> Clearly the bomb will not deter any-

1. Problems of speech and semantics vitiate debate. Concepts such as deterrence are worn out, thus divorced in their semantics from their original meaning. Problems of speech may be more acute, as the vocabulary in use should carefully distinguish between internal and external use, and, further, between party and political use. Failure to make the requisite distinctions creates serious misunderstanding. The extravagantly noisy vocabulary with which the tests were hailed inside the country seemed to mislead the outside world about India's motivations. It provided a fervently aggressive tone. It removed from them their dimension of measured self-defence in the face of an increasingly untenable security risk. It diverted attention from a surreptitious and collusive nuclear weapons programme in the vicinity which evaded controls. The impunity that this programme enjoyed came from an accommodating posture on the part of the guardians of the new covenants that are designed to restrict proliferation.

thing other than another bomb. It will not deter infiltration, low level war, guerrilla movement, religious subversion. Unfortunately, it will not deter conventional warfare either.

So why do we need it? Easy. If only reality is invoked and demonstrated, for instance, by looking at an entirely probable scene. You are at war. It is not inconceivable to make the likely assumption that the war has been imposed on you by aggression, or by the adventurism of which we had a taste in the past. (For the purpose of its credibility, the logic may be applied to a supposed battle initiated by your side, so that there is no undue claim to superior morality.) The other side is not doing well, or at least is in the process of failing in its battlefield objectives; the momentum is against the other side, and accelerating. But it has the bomb and you don't. It will threaten to use it. Of course it may not. Can you take the risk and keep on fighting?<sup>2</sup>

The decision is difficult. You may have to call off the campaign. Or the balance has moved so far in your favour that the other side will not only threaten, it will use the bomb, it will drop it on you, on your cities or on your forces. You cannot deter it, neither the threat nor the use. The only way you can deter its use is by surrender, or by having the bomb yourself. It is hardly ever said that if one does not have the bomb then the only deterrent is surrender. This could make people sit up and, for once, take notice. The whole demonstration is starkly simple.

2. Here let us note that it does not matter who has initiated the fighting, so that we rise above the pedantry that invokes virtue for strategic planning. Virtue is imperative, but irrelevant. The power of the argument is enhanced by allowing for the hypothesis that you may yourself be the aggressor.



This said, the recent bombs have changed nothing, or very little. This depends on if we have been telling the truth on two vital subjects. Do the Pakistanis have the bomb? The tests do not in themselves logically mean that they, or us, either has the bomb. Tests are a means to making the bomb, they are not in themselves a bomb. If they, the Pakistanis, do have a bomb or several, we had to do what was necessary to allow ourselves to develop one, or several. If they already had the bomb, the situation today is better for us than before, presuming that the tests will allow us to make one ourselves. The logic nevertheless gives them, at least for the present, the advantage, simply because they have been ahead.

This brings us to the other subject which we must verify if we have been telling the truth. We have always claimed that we do not have the bomb. This is, it needs clarifying straight away, quite different from Pakistani protestations. They have not been consistent in saying that they do not have a bomb, that they have shown restraint since 1974, that they have felt threatened by India's nuclear capability. On the contrary, they have on several occasions, and through the testimony of their highest authorities, admitted that they do have the bomb. There is other evidence to suggest that this is true. American agencies have presented a convincing case. China has clearly helped Pakistan. No one has helped India; not even the most ardent critics of the Indian nuclear programme say to the contrary.

If we have been telling the truth, then it was necessary that we start the process of making the bomb. We may have some catching up to do but we are in a better situation today. Matters are out in the open. We assume that the Pakistanis have the bomb. The procedure to arrive at this conclusion is not important. They could have been helped by China in several ways; it is not necessary to speculate how. They have recently tested a long range delivery system which threatens India seriously. If we did not have the bomb, and if testing through explosions is necessary to develop one, then we are now better off.

Let us deal with the proposition that we have been telling the truth. There is no reason to think that India has been lying. We are not good at it, notably because we cannot keep secrets, and are prone to leaks.<sup>3</sup> So it was dangerous to allow the situation to endure, and our disadvantages to mount, while we festered in inaction.

3. Some will object by invoking the legend, which is in the making, that the Indian scientists managed to dupe everyone and that the tests we conducted covered the American agencies in the mud of mortification. I am not quite sure about this. It might be that the

If we have been lying then nothing much has changed. But we are still better off, because the essential equilibrium is now visible and thus not open to errors of speculation. It is very dangerous to be faced with a foe who is schooled in deception and skilled in ruse. Inertia can cause one to languish in illusion and complacency.

If therefore, and returning to the solid ground of logic, we have been telling the truth, then the Pakistanis are a little ahead of us, but we are doing what we can to catch up. This is incontrovertible.

While the facts regarding the nuclear balance are quite clear and amenable to coherent reasoning, there have perhaps been deficiencies in the internal management of the issue and the external diplomacy designed to attenuate international reactions.

The bomb is not equivalent to virility. There is in recent international negotiation gathering pressure on nuclear proliferation. There is no reason to presume that the government acted out of political expediency. The party in power has always said that it was going to make India nuclear. Other parties have found irresistible claims to have initiated, or continued, or supported, or strengthened the programme of nuclear development, while indulging in expedient and unprincipled criticism of the government for having done what they said they might themselves have done or claim they nearly did, but which, in the hands of this government, naturally became opportunistic or immoral or dangerous.

This contradiction is evident in the attitudes and statements of the political formations that matter. The parties not in power cannot both say that they have supported the nuclear weapon programme while they were in power, and that the party now in power has made a mess of things by taking it along the path that was already drawn. This is hedging bets in the extreme, a ploy aimed at exploiting the outcome of the explosions, irrespective of the trend of opinion and the course of politics.

Nevertheless India cannot treat the explosions as a purely internal subject. To be fair, it is possible that

Americans knew what was happening and, for motives that will need to be analysed in time, chose not to do anything; nor indeed to reveal that they knew. It should occur to someone that it would have been discomfiting for them to admit that they had the information on Indian preparations to test but did not want, or could not do anything to counter them. Any number of motivations, many of Machiavellian inspiration or of prejudicial intent, could be assigned to explain American dissimulation. At worst it could have been an attempted trap. This may, admittedly, seem fanciful now; especially in intellectual circles that wrongly deny to the Americans the considerable sophistication and skill that the hypothesis implies.

it did so in anticipation of sanctions and the threats and pressures that did not take long to emerge. It might have felt the need to bolster morale, to shore up support, correctly anticipating that the opposition would try to make the most of the opportunity to embarrass the government since the nuclear issue is intrinsically emotive and leads straight to consternation and reprobation.

Even so, we did succumb to a measure of jubilation. No doubt this was partly because the scientists were excited, unable to contain their delight.

But a nuclear test is not the occasion to celebrate a blossoming scientific feat, or proclaim a heroic national triumph, or trumpet a long denied collective birthright. Since the science of nuclear explosions is now commonplace, the accent on self-satisfaction, jubilation and glee was misplaced, exacerbated by braggadocio. To some degree the defiant stance signalled in the direction of Pakistan was understandable. It has been meddling in Kashmir, pursuing a clandestine nuclear arms programme under a great veil of subterfuge, and attempting to construct an arc of hostility around us. The spate of declarations by responsible quarters in India has to be understood in terms of the politics of the country and also as a sign of the frustration which low level wars and infiltration invariably create.

But we do have to look beyond immediate political compulsions. It can be argued that management of the matter should have been predominantly external rather than internal.

There has been failure in preparing opinion. The country has followed, but more from instinct and a natural patriotic urge. The explosions over, the tone should have been grave rather than self-righteous and self-congratulatory. Much has been said about the statements made by the Minister of Defence some time before the tests. Retrospectively, the government has been credited with the design to prepare the public, a design of which it might in fact have been totally innocent. Too much need not be made of the statement made by the minister and the speculation which saw in it either government's confusion or its artful manipulation.

After the tests we should have made clear why we had been forced to carry them out. We should also have reiterated our continuing commitment to denuclearisation as the essential step without which disarmament is either impossible or meaningless.

The emphasis in what we say need not be that we have become a member of the group of nuclear

powers, ready to share in the privileges that this confers and hungry for the impunity with which they can shrug off opinion. We cannot behave like candidates to a club which we deplored until we could join it and conduct ourselves in the same reprehensible ways which has made its members notorious.

We could have said something along these lines: We announce with great regret that we have been compelled by circumstances to proceed to nuclear tests. The regret that we feel is all the greater in view of the consistent position which we have taken in favour of disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament and nuclear testing. We have been driven to the decision because of the development of nuclear weapons in our region, by powers who might be tempted to use them against us or threaten to do so. The recent development of nuclear and delivery capabilities added urgency to our security concerns... and so on. It would have been salutary to rededicate ourselves to the objectives of denuclearisation and disarmament.

There have been altogether too many statements on 'weaponisation'; assertions that we did not for once claim to have conducted what came to be called a PNE (peaceful nuclear explosion); claims to a new status as a member of the nuclear club, and so on. The brutal reality is that, and always on the assumption that we have been telling the truth, it will take us some time to become a full nuclear weapons power. This requires industrial depth and considerable capital outlay, not furtive assembly lines that can be hidden from a curious world and an anxious nation.

A coherent and lucid public information campaign is essential for full and objective understanding of the tests. The absence of such a campaign does not necessarily constitute a fatal indictment of the government. It should be admitted that in matters of public policy there is an institutional weakness inherent in the system. In spite of Parliament and its enquiries and questions, searching or ritualistic, the habit of sharing information has not really taken root. This is deeply incompatible with democratic habit and style. Democratic habit and style are more than just trappings. They are designed for the public interest.

The sharing of information entails wide participation, the necessary condition for the contribution to debate on intelligence in the system. This leads to the fertilisation of policy-making. Policy cannot be made only in the corridors and antechambers of power, where the bureaucracy holds sway. Second, apart from the need for all the intelligence in the system, politics requires openness in debate, the admission of dissent.

Finally, information sharing is the ultimate weapon against the functionary. Secrecy is his final defence against examination. He wants protection against possible exposure of his weaknesses.

When information is not shared, and this is quite apart from the legitimate dictates of secrecy, there can be no effective defence of public policy, and no genuine guarantee of the quality of public policy. The strength of democracy is precisely that it gives you popular sanction for policy. This is what the mandate of the people is about. The civil servant can be insensitive to interrogation and thus unwittingly irrigates the suspicion that he undermines the public interest, the very thing that he is employed to serve.

A word about China, which lurks furtively in the shadow of all that is being said about the nuclear programme and its rationale. Even if the defence ministry of the party in power sought credibility in invoking the nuclear status of China as the reason for our programme, it was invariably Pakistan which lurched into the open at every step. First, because any statement, explicit or unintended or implied which ensnared China seemed illusory. It is true that China has made Pakistan a nuclear power – the evidence for that is no longer disputed – but the preoccupation with Pakistan could not be camouflaged.

It is still necessary to define a policy regarding China and the security implications of its nuclear and military preponderance in the region. We do need a weapon to deter China were it to be tempted to use nuclear blackmail, simply because it has a nuclear capability. This logic is only mechanical, but makes good sense. Nevertheless, we are far from achieving deterrence against China. For that we need the capability of mutually assured destruction. This remains distant.

China does indeed have the capability of massive destruction and prohibitive damage of Indian targets because it has a well developed arsenal, one that was developed with one, and even two, of the superpowers in mind. It has enjoyed a nuclear weapons capability for decades and has developed intercontinental

4. The embarrassment for India when the French tests were announced might be recalled; as being not entirely unrelated to the issue in its entirety. The evening (13 June 1995) that French President Jacques Chirac announced the resumption of tests, the Indian Prime Minister was on an official visit in France. Curiously the announcement was made by the French President at the very moment when the French Prime Minister, in the course of his welcoming banquet speech, was upbraiding his guest for India's nuclear policy, particularly with regard to non-proliferation. The irony was not lost on observers. Some even saw the incident as an affront.

delivery vehicles. For the Indian reach, China is too vast a land and this country's nuclear and missile capabilities are no match. All we can hope for is the ability to inflict serious damage, with a substantial degree of pain, if China launches a nuclear attack. This can be taken as axiomatic by planners who are hardheaded, without illusions about the peaceful professions of neighbours.

The deficiency in diplomacy and public opinion management following the explosions has been relative. But there is no doubt that the decision itself and its execution were exemplary. First, the uncharacteristic secrecy has been encouraging. We are discovering a new quality in ourselves, leaving aside possible American disingenuousness.

A comparison can be made with the pain that the French inflicted on themselves when they announced their last series of tests.<sup>4</sup> One can compare the careful stage-setting of the last set of French tests with the suddenness of the Indian ones. The Indians did not announce the tests; they carried them out. They did not talk about a series, and then compress the timing because of diplomatic embarrassment. They quite quickly and unexpectedly did two lots, and contrived some ambiguity about future testing. There was no inconsistency or change of policy.

Unlike the sharp turnaround after Mitterrand, who actually thought that he had bound France forever not to test, the BJP has always said it would make the country go nuclear. Moreover, India, across the political spectrum, has consistently rejected the non-proliferation approach. The French were ambiguous about testing; in India there is wide support for the act. The French nuclear force is designed for independence from allies; the Indian programme is aimed at enemies. This distinction is fundamental.

Finally, there is no point in engaging in debate on economic waste. The fundamentalist argument is that the money should be spent on the poor, in improving conditions of living, on education and the infrastructure. A thousand, and more, better uses for the money could be found. The argument can equally apply to tanks, artillery guns, fighter or bomber aircraft, less murderous bombs – which also kill. It is not clear how one sort of dying by explosives is better than another, the difference being the type of explosive. Life is like that. Money goes to all the wrong things. But we live in this world, with neighbours who do not descend to us from paradise.

**Ranjit Sethi**

# Backpage

PRIDE and glory. A redemption of national honour. A recovery of our lost manhood. So went the litany after the 'successful' explosions at Pokharan. What we need is a *shakti peeth* at the site, a symbol of our second, and 'true' independence. The dust of Pokharan should be taken around the country, *a la* the *Gangajal* pitchers during the *Ekatmata Yagna* in the early eighties and the Ram Mandir bricks a few years later. This, so the ideologues of the ruling dispensation inform us, is the route to a new and resurgent nationalism.

The euphoria may have subsided somewhat with the equally successful testing of nuclear devices by Pakistan a mere two weeks after the Indian explosions. But the machismo still lingers on, most markedly in the leaders of the Pokharan state, Rajasthan. After all, they now claim ownership of the new holy site.

Strange are the ways of the victors. Forget Alexander and his graciousness towards Porus. That was only a reflection of weakness, an absence of the much needed killer instinct. We, so goes the refrain, will ground our enemies into the dust.

Throughout this phase of a steady rise of atavistic nationalism and pride, the 'valorous' state of Rajasthan has been conducting a war on its women. The state is among the leaders, from the bottom, in every single index of gender equity and empowerment: abysmal literacy rates, a high incidence of infant mortality, stark inequality in gender disaggregated wage rates, widespread practice of female infanticide, and come *Akha Teej* – thousands of child marriages. But nothing reflects the true status of women in Rajasthan as the climbing graph of sexual violence. Rape, remember, is the time honoured right of the victors.

Earlier in the decade, the state was rocked by the sex scandal of Ajmer. Religious functionaries (one must confess to significant unease in the use of the term religious), along with petty businessmen, had for years successfully blackmailed young women into a sex racket. Expectedly, our bureaucrats and politicians were proverbially blind. At some stage the bubble burst. Given public outcry, individuals had to be charge-sheeted and tried. Recently, they were even convicted. But they cannot be jailed. The administration has been unable to locate and apprehend them.

A few years later, a similar scandal came to light in Alwar, this time involving important functionaries of the ruling party. Progress, none. The infamous

Bhanwari Bai rape, notwithstanding nation-wide protests and campaigns, fared no better. Why, the honourable court pronounced that the charge was fictitious. The learned judges found it difficult to comprehend how 'respectable' members of the upper castes could engage in such a defiling act, that too with a woman belonging to the lower orders. How indeed!

Rajasthan, remember, is the pioneer in women's development. It is another matter that this much touted programme is now floundering because the government is unable to decide what it should pay the *saathins* who are the backbone of the programme. It's a moot point that Bhanwari Bai too is a *saathin*, one who was rewarded for her labours in trying to put a stop to the practice of child marriage by rape.

Given such a glorious record, the latest 'incident' of the alleged gang rape of a young woman a second time around should not shock. But even in a state revelling in a Viagra induced, post-Pokharan rediscovery of its lost manhood, the brutal and calculated violence on a woman barely recovered from her earlier traumas cannot but force the residents of the state to hang their heads in shame. The object this time around was to unambiguously impress upon her who the real masters were. She, and her family, had the temerity to try and bring the perpetrators of the earlier crime to justice.

Of course, the various women's organisations protested, and vigorously. The National Commission for Women was quick on the scene. Not, however, the guardians of our public morality. The local media, swift in its sensationalising, added its usual dash of salacious gossip and innuendo. It was as if the woman had wished it upon herself.

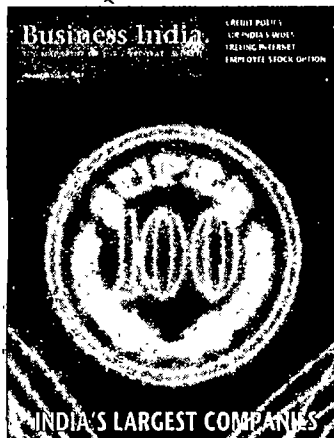
The state leadership expectedly took its cue from the media. To the malicious disinformation campaign was added the damage limitation exercise in the form of a policy paper on women's development. Having done so, it turned its attention to more important affairs – strategising about the forthcoming elections.

The 'accused' roam around free. Their honour and pride remains intact. In a *weltenschaung* that places Roop Kanwar of Deorala alongside Padmini of Chittor, where *jauhar* is equated with forced *sati*, honour and pride are not easily dented. Shame is a far cry. We, after all, have the Bomb. What's a rape or two.

Harsh Sethi

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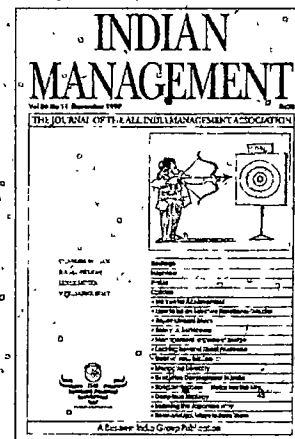
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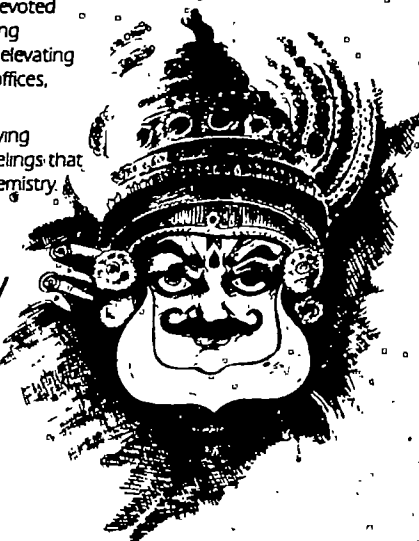
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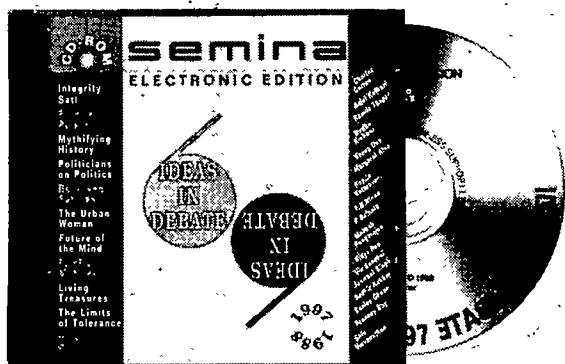
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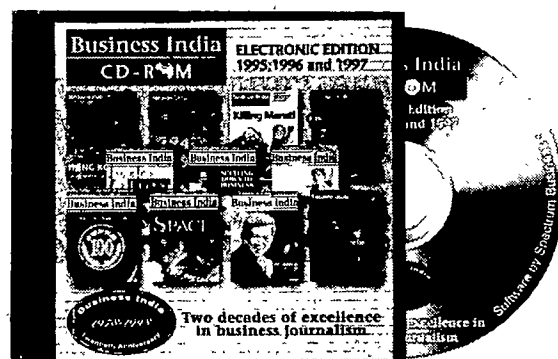


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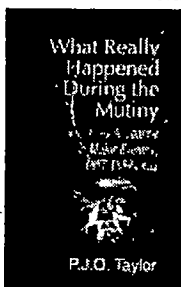
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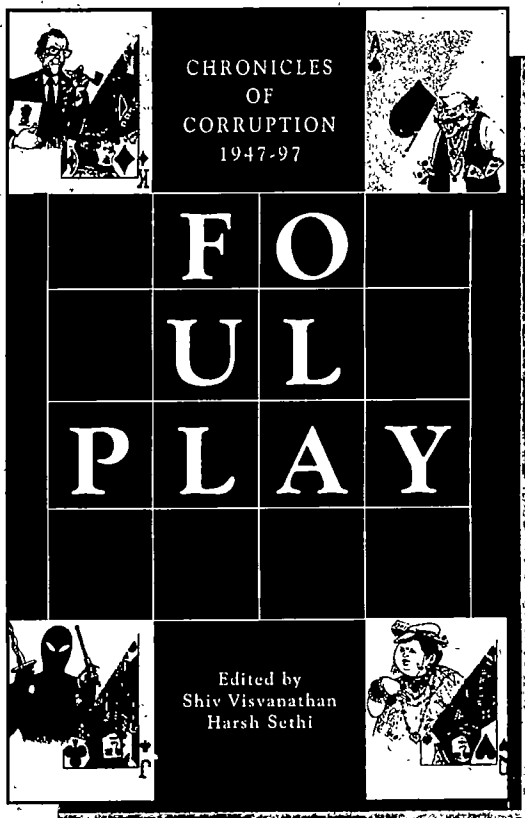
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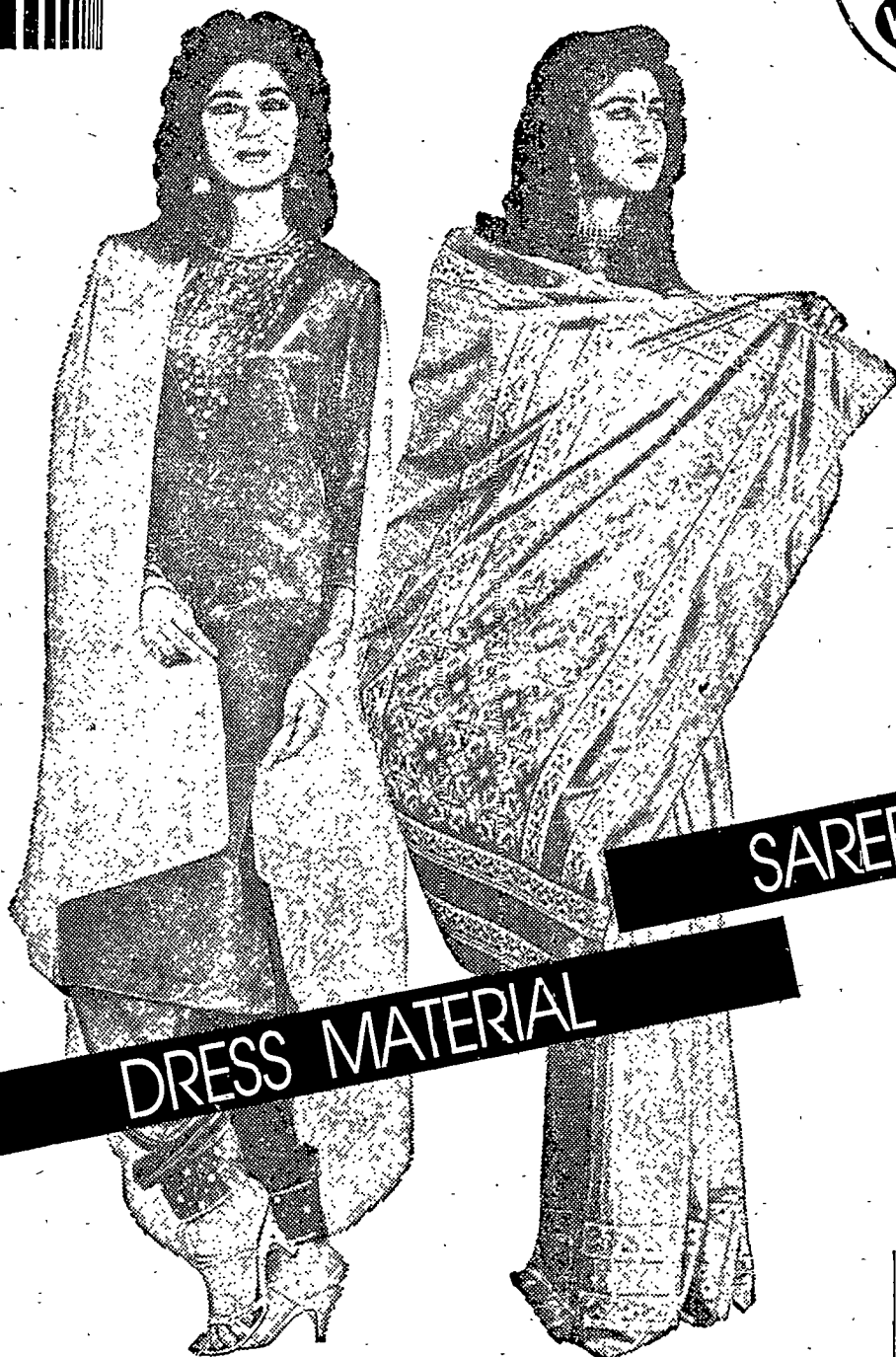
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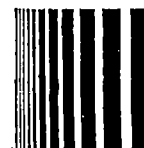
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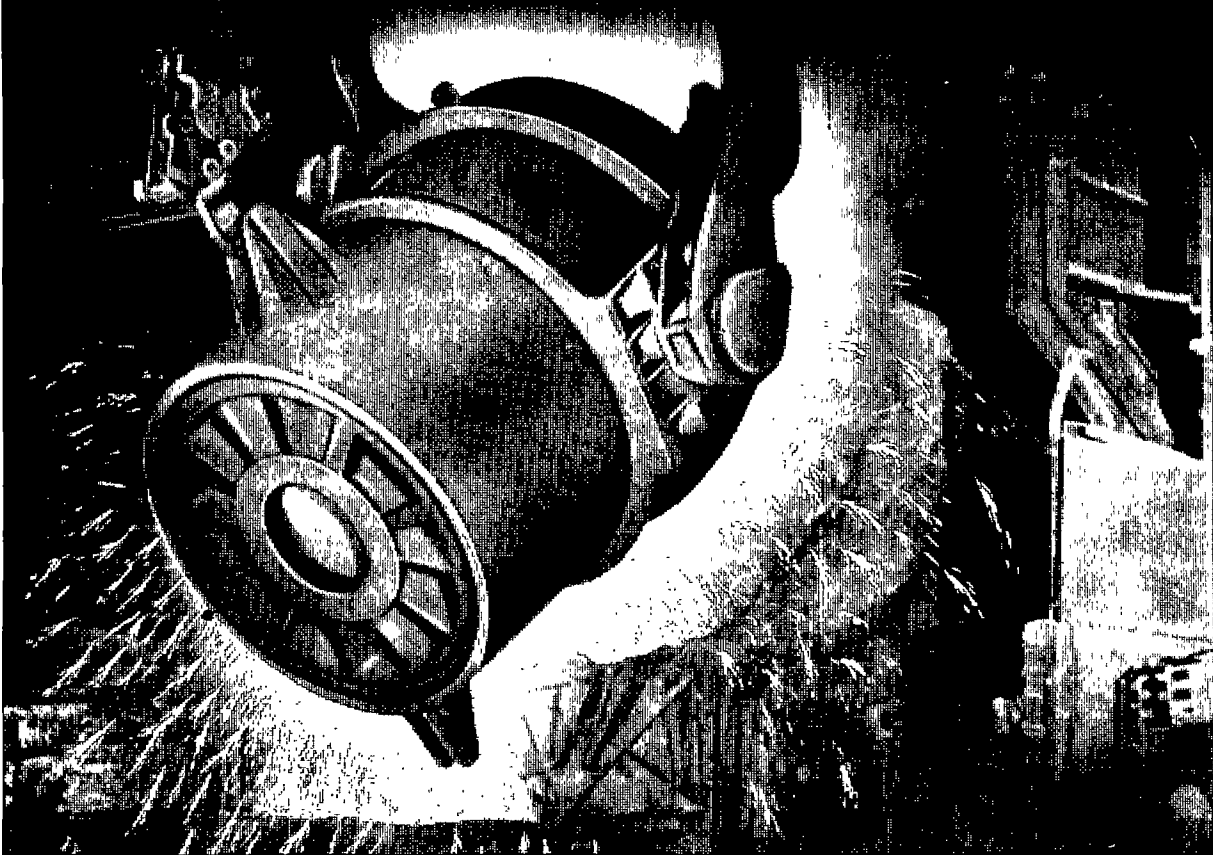
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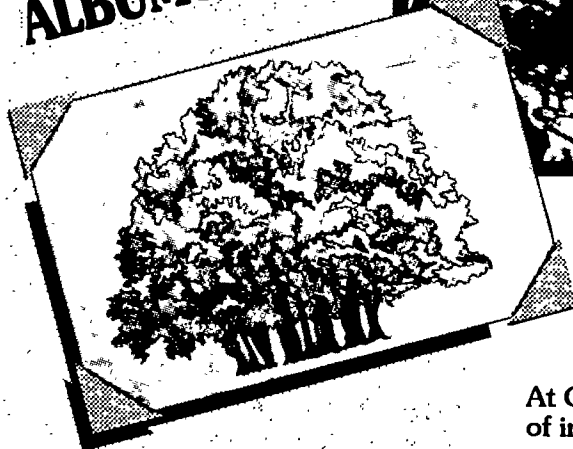
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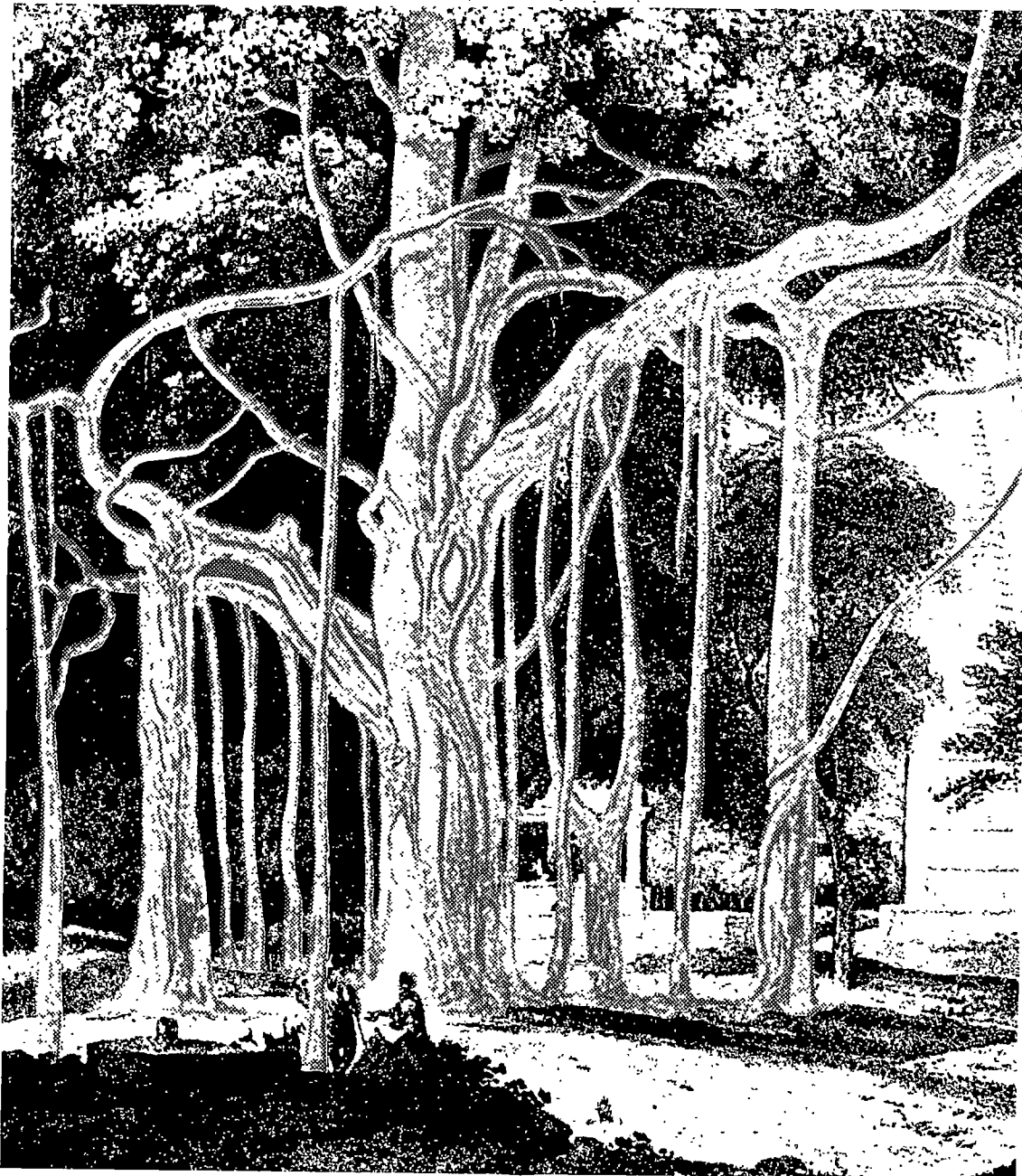
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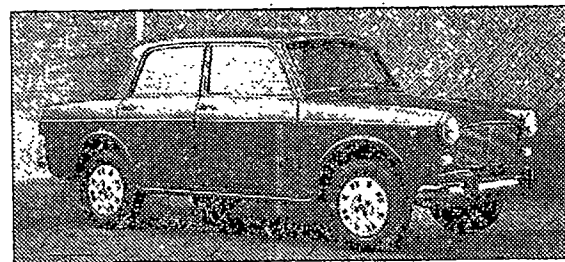
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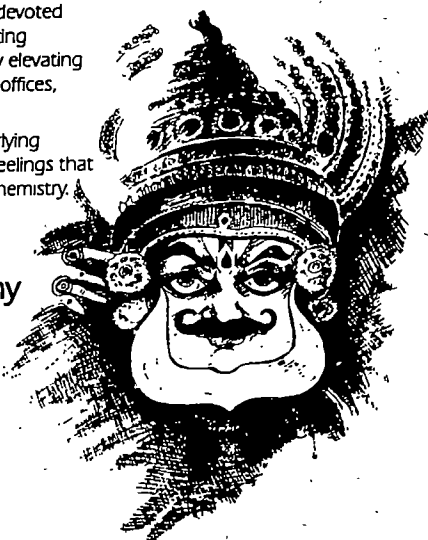
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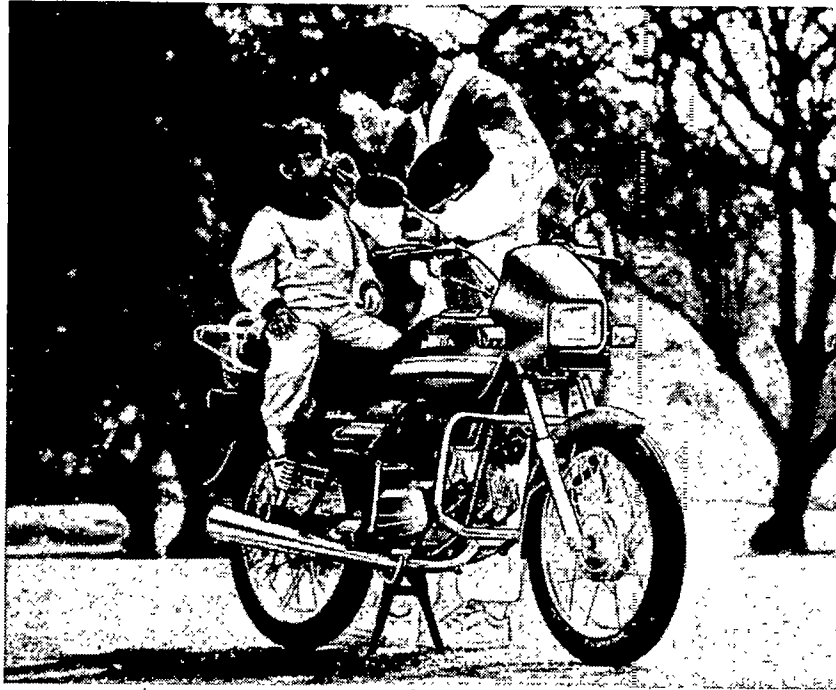
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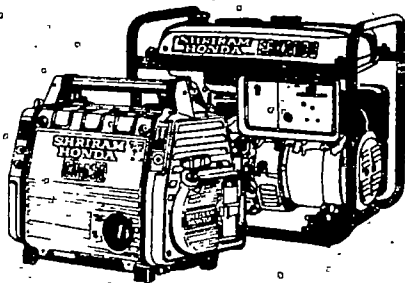
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# 468

## NUCLEAR (IN)SECURITY

a symposium on

the fallout of

the nuclear tests

### symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
Posed by Harsh Sethi, Consulting Editor, 'Seminar'
- 15 **SCENARIOS IN SEARCH OF A BOMB**  
Shiv Visvanathan, Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of  
Developing Societies, Delhi
- 20 **NUCLEAR POWER AND HUMAN SECURITY**  
Itty Abraham, Programme Director, Social Science  
Research Council, New York
- 24 **TESTING THE WORLD ORDER**  
Siddharth Varadarajan, Assistant Editor, 'The Times of India'
- 33 **LIVING A NUCLEAR LIFE**  
Zia Mian, Center for Energy and Environmental Studies,  
Princeton University, USA
- 38 **COPING WITH NUCLEAR REALITY**  
Iftikharuzzaman, Executive Director, Regional Centre for  
Strategic Studies, (RCSS), Colombo
- 43 **A VIEW FROM NEPAL**  
Kunda Dixit, journalist; Director, The Panos Institute of  
South Asia and co-publisher, 'Himal', Kathmandu
- 46 **MACHISMO, MADNESS AND A MESS**  
L. Ramdas, retired Admiral; former Chief of the Naval Staff,  
Alibag, Maharashtra
- 50 **DO NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROVIDE SECURITY?**  
M.V. Ramana, The Security Studies Programme, MIT, Cambridge
- 55 **DISTORTION OF SCIENTIFIC TRADITIONS**  
Amulya K.N. Reddy, Director, International Energy  
Initiative, Bangalore
- 60 **INDIAN SCIENCE AFTER POKHRAN II**  
T. Jayaraman, The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai
- 65 **SECURITY, MORALITY AND NATIONAL PRIDE**  
Vinod Raina, physicist; co-founder Eklavya, Bhopal
- 69 **LEGAL STATUS**  
M. Siddharth, Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- 71 **DOCUMENT**  
Indian Memorial to the ICJ
- 75 **MAKING CHOICES**  
Manjula Padmanabhan, playwright, Delhi
- 80 **COMMENT**  
Received from Bhaskar Bhattacharyya, writer and film-maker, Delhi
- 83 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by Anita Roy, Anindita Mukhopadhyay,  
M. Siddharth and Jug Suraiya
- 93 **FURTHER READING**  
Compiled by M. Siddharth, JNU, Delhi
- 98 **COMMUNICATION**  
Received from Medico Friends Circle, Sevagram
- 99 **IN MEMORIUM**  
Nikhil Chakravartty, 1913-1993
- 102 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdhury DCA

## The problem

*Some nights  
my eyes open  
and I think that  
those scientists who invented  
atomic weapons:  
when they heard the news of  
the terrible genocide of Hiroshima-Nagasaki,  
How did they sleep at night?  
Did they, for a second even,  
Get the feeling that what they had done  
Was not right?  
If so, then time will not put them in the dock.  
But if not then history will never  
Forgive them.*

— A.B. Vajpayee\*

INDIA goes nuclear, screamed the ecstatic headlines. The prime minister smiled, flashing a victory sign. Opinion polls reported an upbeat mood. The opposition was in disarray. This was mid-May, 1998.

Ten weeks after the 'successful' explosions at Pokhran, the absence of euphoria, even among those who celebrated 'the smile of Buddha' with sweets and crackers, is evident. The hype about our great scientific achievement; of having restored pride to an emasculated nation and in one fell swoop, of having altered

the global power balance, no longer dominates the media. Instead, what we witness is a desperate exercise of damage limitation, hopefully without losing face.

So why is it that after a quarter century of nuclear ambiguity we decided to gatecrash into the exclusive and 'immoral' club of the nuclear weapon states? Surely, not just because the BJP, leader in the ruling coalition, had never hidden its intention of exploding the bomb. Or that its tired old men, hamstrung by the unseemly wrangling in their political arrangements, were keen to demonstrate decisiveness. Or even that the bomb was expected to deliver significant domestic political advantages.

Central to the imagination of the nuclear advocates is the belief, mistaken, that the bomb implies power. The argument being that in an unequal world dominated by the P5 states, the route to our rightful place in the comity of nations is through ignoring the NPT and CTBT and forcing entry into 'the club'. Only then will the world take us seriously.

The pro-bombers have repeatedly asserted that we had no option, that continuing nuclear ambiguity offered no further advantages, that with the final dates for ratifying the CTBT fast approaching, the time to go overtly nuclear was now. It was further argued that our security environment had worsened, that given the speed with which Pakistan was developing its nuclear and missile programmes, ostensibly with *sub-rosa* help

\* 'The Pain of Hiroshima', in *My Fifty-one Poems*. Kitab Ghar, Delhi, 1995 (translated from Hindi).

from China and the US, the time for diplomatic initiatives was over.

There were claims about other potential benefits. One expectation was that having demonstrated our nuclear capacity we could successfully bargain for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Or that we could now, more meaningfully, settle outstanding issues with our neighbours. Even that this would reduce the possibility of war.

Critics have pointed out that the decision to go overtly nuclear was badly handled, particularly in the early display of jingoistic exuberance and a blasé unconcern about diplomatic fallouts. All that it managed was to provide Pakistan the 'justification' for its retaliatory testing. And the unnecessary targeting of China, that too in a badly drafted letter to Bill Clinton, only helped further consolidate the Pakistan-China axis. Our other neighbours, whatever their public pronouncements, cannot be pleased about N-bombs in their backyard. Even more because we were too foolish and arrogant in not immediately writing to them, allaying their fears and offering them a no nuclear use, no war pact.

Globally, both India and Pakistan have added to insecurity and increased the likelihood of nuclear proliferation. With the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union, the little progress that had been made towards denuclearisation has been pushed back.

To first focus on security and defence. Just how does a nuclearised sub-continent enhance our national or regional security? Nuclear neighbours, more so with a history of discord, make for an unstable brew. Unlike in the US-Soviet Union case, the time difference between any one side making a move and the other retaliating is so short that there is no possibility of consultation or withdrawal.

Realists argue that nuclear weapons are not for use but for deterrence, that the sole stated purpose of such weapons is to prevent their use. Strange logic. Just how does this rule out nuclear war? Ever heard of accidents, miscalculations, or madmen? The number of times the world has come close to exterminism is legion, all well recorded. But yet, we persist with the delusion. Finally, possession of nuclear weapons does nothing to reduce the likelihood of cross border infiltrations, low intensity conflict, or even conventional war. Baldly stated, we will not resolve Kashmir by going nuclear; all we have done is to successfully internationalise it.

By no account does going nuclear reduce our defence expenditures, already much too high for a poor country. If we total up the cost of the bomb (number/types), delivery mechanisms (missiles/aircrafts/submarines), surveillance systems, command and control mechanisms and all the associated paraphernalia required for a credible nuclear capability, only then do we realise what we have let ourselves in for, more so

since weapon systems require constant upgradation. The argument that 'national security recognises no costs' only contributes to taking the issue outside the purview of reasoned debate.

And then there are sanctions, an inevitable fall-out of the decision. We may put up a brave face, but there is no running away from the fact that they will hurt. It is not just reduced foreign investment, the abandoning of projects mid-way, or new restrictions on trade and aid – the harsh reality is that we have become an insecure destination, a high risk one. Couple this with high defence expenditures resulting in a re-allocation of resources away from production and welfare sectors, and the true costs start emerging.

Finally the slogan, *Jai Vigyan*. Why a 'successful' demonstration of a fifty year old technology should be touted as a remarkable achievement of Indian science appears bizarre. We may be entitled to satisfaction on a rare display of teamwork, on our ability (for once) to keep the decision secret, on successfully taking the US spy establishment by surprise, or even that, unlike Pakistan, our nuclear technology was purportedly *swadeshi*. But, as a scientific achievement, Pokhran II, though an advance on Pokhran I, is nothing to write home about. Far more distressing is the glorification of our science and scientists in developing weapons of mass destruction. And the fact that our senior scientists are willing, if not eager, accomplices in this deliberate erasure of potential holocaust.

It is insufficiently realized that the fuelling of our nuclear programme owes as much to our amoral scientists as our amoral politicians, across the spectrum. So excited are they with their nuclear experiments and toys, and the possibility of increased resources and accolades, that they seem to have forgotten even the pangs of conscience and guilt that afflicted those who worked on the Manhattan project, particularly after Hiroshima. Or that even when the war with Japan was conclusively won, the bomb was dropped at Nagasaki as part of a scientific experiment.

There is, whatever Raja Ramanna, the 'grandfather' of the Indian nuclear establishment might claim, *nothing* defensible about nuclear technology, even less the decision to weaponise. In the five decades since the technology first made its appearance, we have still not managed to reduce the hazards associated with the nuclear industry. Even as a mode of generating electricity, euphemistically called peaceful use of nuclear energy, it remains unsafe and uneconomical. As a weapons system, it is indiscriminate, not just between soldiers and civilians, but between present and future

generations. No wonder, the International Court of Justice at the Hague pronounced the use of nuclear weapons as violative of international humanitarian law. Incidentally, the Indian deposition on to the ICJ argued strongly for a complete ban on the use of nuclear weapons. And this as recently as 1996.

All nuclear establishments are secretive. They lie about the costs and the potential hazards associated with their profession. In most places, including India, they seek and secure relative autonomy from not just the public but political authority. Our atomic establishment has never been put through a public audit. You never come to know about cost over-runs, radiation leaks, cancer deaths, whatever. If anything, it is hyper sensitive to criticism, helping consolidate what Robert Jungk calls an Atom Staat.

Further, their internal drive to produce bigger, better, more destructive weapons leads them to devise new languages of risk, promise new possibilities of power – a combination that the political establishment finds difficult to resist. No wonder, for the first time we heard of the need for a military-industrial complex. And our Minister of Defence obliged by throwing open the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to the private sector.

The real argument against the nuclear option is moral and ethical. Ashwatthama's use of the *brahmashtra* resulted in his *mani* being snatched away by Krishna. Being immortal, he was condemned to being a pariah in perpetuity, wandering somewhere in disgrace. A mindset that can reduce the possibility of total extermination to game theoretic scenarios of acceptable risk is evil and merits unilateral rejection. Let us not forget that both Brazil and Argentina called off the military part of their nuclear programmes once civilian rule was restored. So did South Africa after Nelson Mandela took over. So did Scandinavia, Germany and Japan. We do have precedents.

Living under the constant threat of extermination is hardly conducive to reasoned discourse. But that is what our respective ruling establishments have brought us to. The one silver lining is that many people, experts and lay citizens, have for once come out against the decision to overtly go nuclear, the plan to move from capability demonstration to weaponisation. And so is the case in Pakistan. Our rulers have started frantic damage limitation exercises. Possibly the usual South Asian inefficiency will be enough to thwart the grandiose plans. Maybe wisdom will finally prevail. This issue of *Seminar* is dedicated to this hope.

HARSH SETHI



# Scenarios in search of a bomb

SHIV VISVANATHAN

THE following drafts, found at the Mohan Singh Place coffee house in Delhi, were passed on to the CID by an informer. The notes were a great source of consternation and puzzlement. They were not the usual peacenik nonsense and what made them even more suspicious was that there was laughter in them. Early efforts to empirically evaluate the documents proved futile. When that didn't work, the extracts moved up the hierarchy, eventually landing up at the table of O.M., Deputy Director. O.M. read them, laughed and then turned thoughtful. The notes were 'as if' pieces, heuristics but extremely real and rather accurate. O.M. had only six months left in office and he was fed up with politicians and the bomb. He decided to add his bit of defiance and put the notes back into circulation.

Imagine yourself in the RSS office. Don't think of men in *khaki* shorts or shopkeepers with bulging stomachs. Think of a generation beyond the Savarkars and the old Arya Samajis with martial moustaches, raised on Tilak and Lajpat Rai. They are sitting around the table; men like Gurumurthy and Govindacharya. Tired of seeing India lose again and again. Thinking of India with its civilizational past and

its flaccid democratic present. An India of continuous defeats with a report card of B minuses.

These are nationalists who have projected their ego on to the state. The state as a persona, not the machine like state of socialism. Nor the effete state of Jawaharlal or the designer boutique state of Rajiv and Sonia. A state that is the ultimate Rorschach of a middle class desperate to be great. A middle class tired of socialism, happy to be consumers but desperate to share greatness and have a moment in history.

These are powerful men, actors who feel that the Indian state was withering away because it had no theory of greatness. They know that the BJP is a trend-setter by default, that the Congress and United Front are just weaker versions of it. The BJP has a clarity beyond their confusion, a clarity that combines both banality and greatness. The banality of consumerism and the heroism of the state. Their Archimedean equation: Markets and State power = Greatness. Better than Soviets+Electricity=Communism or the pseudo-secular 'dams and laboratories are the temples of modern India'.

They know that what India needs is an affable hybrid, something

nativist based on potboiler history and something global. Govindacharya tried to sum it up. Dabur + BARC = Success. They were looking for words, slogans, which could be both fixed and protean. Digital words, something disembodied and yet attractive enough for everyone to lay claim to them. They needed to convert weakness to strength. *Problem*: 900 million people is a demographic nightmare. *Solution*: 900 million people is a marketing dream. *Moral*: move from demography to consumerism.

Step II was simple. Appropriately the discourse of the other. Reclaim secularism from your opponents. That shifts attention from your communalism. Insist on the uniform civil code. That makes you as secular as the metric system. Now grab nationalism. Eat into your opponents' capital and insist yours is the only legacy left. Modernize through cinematisation *rathyatras*, but in Toyota cars. Provide the idea that you are modernizing your heritage. Paramilitarize the mind of a society so that everyone has the unconscious of a soldier salivating when the flag is up. Then change the meaning of the flag. Create a tutorial college nationalism.

**R**emember, citizenship should be Pavlovian and based on minimal myths: A great civilization. A nation whose time has come. The great modernizers. Project your leaders as archetypes. Advani as the modernized RSS. Rithambhara as the ascetic woman. Sushma Swaraj as the careful budget-balancing housewife. Vajpayee as the leader every Congressman wants. Pramod Mahajan as the eternal commerce graduate. Remember, commerce is the true university model. It has everything and nothing. Now if you want physics, let it wear an *angavastram* like Murli Manohar Joshi. Project him as the sage with new powers, the *rishi* with a Ph.D. degree,

at home in the Science Congress but relaxed in a *jagaran*.

Learn from the modern. From Wall Street. From Downing. From Madison Avenue. Remember propaganda should never be flat-footed. Advertising taught one that: Voting for the BJP is like starting a long affair with the nation. Offer dreams and utopias. Dreams for the individual consumer and utopias of a great state. Hybridize, but by absorbing the old. Result: BJP looks like the old Congress. Professor M.G.K. Menon thinks so. So does *India Today*. Hint that Indira, Rajiv and Sonia are aberrations. Project Vajpayee as the ethnic Nehru and Advani as the uncaged Patel.

Now you are set. You have made it to power, but with grace-marks. You have topped the university with 56%. You need 12 to 16 grace-marks. A middle class nightmare. A stigma one has to carry till the next exam:

**T**ough times, particularly when the girl next door has the mind of a Cleopatra and the physique of Big Bertha. Survival in politics becomes a three-legged race with her and you start stumbling and looking indecisive. What do you do? Simple. Hijack the legacy of earlier regimes, add *tadka* and present it as your own. What did India produce in the last 50 years? A nation, science and a confused middle class. What can rejuvenate all three? What can give the nation-state legitimacy, science, a purpose, and the middle classes a sense of euphoria and participation? Enter the Bomb. The bomb is inflatable ego, an inflatable raft; it is inflated science. It is a high, the Viagra for a tired India. Translated, *chyavanprash* in every mouth.

Phase II is not so easy. You have taken someone's play and signed as author. But the crowd loves it. You have delivered the lines that others were rehearsing. How does one pro-

ceed, mark one's way? One needs trial balloons.

Power to be power must remember its contiguity to the clown and the frontman. Remember you can think aloud through them. Remember they are dispensable, disposable. Enter Rangarajan Kumaramangalam and George Fernandes, ready to go where angels and the RSS fear to tread. Any pretext will do for these two. An informal interview. A business talk. Announce China is the real danger, which it is. Declare that nuclear power is good, clean Brahminic stuff, which it is not. Test the air with canaries that can also sing. Meanwhile the bombs are ready.

A sequence of them. Now you arrange them in a series which represents India. 50 years of Indian waffling, whining, ambiguity and hypocrisy fast-forwarded into clarity. First the simple Pokhran bomb of 1974 vintage. A reminder of our Indira Gandhian past. A salute to the Congress. Then a medium device, a bit like the UF. Then the hydrogen bomb to announce that the big boys (BJP) have arrived. Then two designer bombs, so that those in the know can smell the real touch of nuclear cuisine from aperitif to dessert. Bravo.

**E**very bomb needs two things: security to provide secrecy and a PRO agency to coordinate the aftermath of the announcement. Everyone should feel the bomb is theirs. India should stand prouder. But like the US dollar, there have to be twin messages. One must telegraph both money and power. To avoid or trim sanctions, one must speak the language of the market. Tell the world that India has a middle class, bigger than Europe. A consumer market that will make businessmen drool. It is our banal, maligned, unheroic middle class that comes to our rescue. Consumerism and the atom staat, i.e. consumerism

at the megaton level. You produce it; we will eat it – Coke. Basmati rice. Comics. Condoms. Music. Electricity. Pornography. Donald Duck. Chewing Gum. Chips. Food. Energy. Infrastructure. If the bomb makes us feel Indian, the middle class completes the Clintonization of India. No American is going to abort a market of that size.

Temporary outrage, why not? I will huff and puff and blow your house down. The happy hypocritical noise of politics. Remember the Olaf Palme strategy. Come to India to talk peace and quietly sell your Bofors guns. Peace and a bit of trade. Every *bania* understands it. So does every American and Japanese.

RSS Sutra-I

The H-bomb is a scientific experiment. The H-bomb is a thought experiment.

Equation-I: Consumer democracy + Statist jingoism = Globalization  
Equation-II: Swadeshi = McCarthyism + Kellogg Cornflakes.

**B**ut let us settle for Equation One. What now? Continue borrowing. Borrow the myths of the enemy but change history by enacting it as myth. Take three simple myths:

\* The Just War hypothesis (Christian)

\* Islamic Bomb

\* Historical Necessity (Marxist)

and transform them, Hindu style. Take the desert sands of Pokhran and *shilanyas* it through Rajasthan. The atomic *jal*, gel. It is the Babri model all over again. Make every Indian feel a part of historical necessity. Also let every Indian invent his own bit of nationalism. Protest against the US. Fast in front of the UN. Beat up another community. Just enough to keep things in order. If there is excess, crack down. What is the Rapid Action Force for? Flood India with the atomic *jagaran* from Baba Sehgal to Anuradha Paudwal.

Think of two further exercises. Remember the flag is like a spectrum. There is infrared and ultraviolet, which are not formally represented. On one side, think of the new corporate citizens of India. Coke. Pepsi. ITT. The coy bevy of banks. Exim. Also Enron. Even the Japanese, ready to weep at sanctions, set to play *samurai* for a few weeks and then plan for business as usual. Woo them all. They are the fourth stripe to the flag, our united colours of Benetton.

**F**or once, the NRIs are going to be useful as a power group to work on recalcitrant US Congressmen. As channels for finance in the tough interim period. As advocates of long distance nationalism. *Mera Bharat Mahan* looks best on internet.

Also play it easy. Tell the Americans that China violates human rights. That Pakistan is getting Islamic. Enough to splinter opinion. Remember it is the lobbies which are dangerous but an election contribution or two helps. Indians abroad should behave like the Jews. Remember there are more Zionists in New York than in Israel. Similarly, we should have more *swadeshi* jingoists in Silicon Valley than in New Delhi. Weave these technocratic fundamentalists into the cause; give them awards for their internet valour. They will love it and also feel that India with the killer instinct is reborn. Remember who we are. The India of Khorana and Arundhati Roy, Viswanathan Anand and Sachin Tendulkar. What does Pakistan have to match? Their Who's Who is emptier than the neanderthal telephone directory.

If the timing is crucial, time is equally so. When the euphoria of the first six months is over, there will come the time to pay toll tax. Now comes the mastery of details. Sign CTBT but cringe at every line. Join the

Big Five hypocrisy. The five with AIDS who pretend to be virgins. But be less jingoist in international circles. Be the quiet tough boys. Leave the Billy Graham stuff to USA and Blair. They do it better.

Step one is simple. Within a year you are back in business. Once the sanction games have been played, it is time to increase moral capital. Remember this is also a scale. At one end is Saddam Hussein. He is 10 on the Gaddafi scale, i.e. he has zero moral capital. At the other end is Nelson Mandela. He has surplus. We have to move to the Mandela end. After all we have fought nuclear apartheid. Show we are independent but mind our business. We are not communist or Islamic. We will fight terrorism, drugs, AIDS. Play the World Bank's good boy theory of governance. The rules are simple:

\* Emphasize human rights (i.e. remove child labour)

\* Respect contracts (free market plus yes to CTBT)

\* Fight terrorism

\* Organize campaigns against drugs

\* Go big on fighting AIDS

Globalization is simple as far as the Americans are concerned. Even better. Get moral by getting into all the ecology committees.

Support the United Nations force. We should be home in a year. *Jai Shri Ram*. But now let us move to Take II.

**A**ssume the secret committee of US Congressmen appointed by Clinton to monitor sanctions goes haywire. Worse, assume there is a riot or two. Add to it a human rights violation that pins the Shiv Sena and, worse, is played up by *The New York Times* and *Newsweek*. The sanctions begin to bite as Blair gets back to the colony on the second round.

Partly, there is also a miscalculation. We didn't listen to the warnings

about playing it cool. Our defiance was too strident and the US decided to project Pakistan as a major player in the Islamic group. We have to be punished.

There are the divisions in India, a distortion in the swadeshi agenda. The public likes the nuclear politics but the business community is not too happy about the opening up of the economy. The old family firms and the new fixers feel intimidated. The Bajajs, the Nandas, the Shrirams, the Kirloskars, and our friendly Jet Airways feel globalization does not help them. In fact, it exposes them. Short of the Ambanis, these firms are fairly moribund.

**T**he government gradually realizes that the biggest beneficiaries of socialism have been Indian businessmen. With all the controls, they have become perfect slobs. Their strategy had been simple. Complain about controls, champion free market and freedom and be socialism's biggest beneficiaries. Now, without socialism, Indian business feels orphaned. Nude. Hypocritical. Desperate for a fig leaf.

One needs a new buzzword and thank God for swadeshi. When your politics does not work (i.e. you are still a second-class power) and your business doesn't work (you are a third-rate business community), then swadeshi helps. It is a moral capital that you can borrow at low interest rates. So a deal is struck between BJP and business to cap globalization. In the name of swadeshi.

The strategy is simple. Spread a sense of paranoia. No one loves us because we are as good as them. To populism, add a bit of repression. You can handle repression through national security. Marry national security and swadeshi and you are home. Even if the home is a second-rate one and you feel like sawdust Saddams. So the

BJP stalls MNCs through principled attrition. The Left can't complain and the Congress is ambivalent. By that time even Chandrababu Naidu is deeply implicated and anyway computers is one field in which we are shining bright.

**O**ne thing about mediocrity is that it is never lonely and it has 'moral luck'. The Pakistanis provide us with a border skirmish, something small and just right for our jingoistic boots. The gung-ho epidemic spreads again and even sensible people heave a nationalist sigh or two. The US gets tough and BJP behaves reasonably. Things simmer down and so it moves to handle the enemy within.

It moves against the unions obtaining control of them. The new anti-hartal laws make it easy. INTUC and AITUC reel under the onslaught. Their leadership is impotent as a group of Weimar politicians. Worse still, Jyoti Basu obliges by giving up the ghost and the CPM is tottering in shambles in Bengal. With Mamata happy to be a well-behaved Jayalalitha, the RSS ideologues grin smugly to themselves. Apart from one or two burps from the PUCL-Amnesty section, the stables are clean. The next election sees the BJP home with 278.

Still, there is uneasiness in the air. It is the people who seem tired of swadeshi. Democracy is one import they don't want to embargo. But national security needs bigger solvents than disquiet. Indians, like the Pakistanis, are ready to eat grass as long as they have the bomb.

There is a small addendum to the above. Govindacharya and Gurumurthi felt an internal audit of decisions and strategies was necessary. The usual astrologers promising greatness in 2001 was not enough. They felt the need to talk to someone wise, above the noise of everyday politics. They

decided to meet 'the historian'.

The old historian smiled, chewing quietly on some invisible nut in his mouth. 'The BJP regime is a soft state,' he said, 'a state without a vision. It thinks of consequences for about two weeks. Empires are not built in a fortnight.'

The ideologues were uneasy, wondering whether the visit was a good idea. 'What is to be done?' one of them asked.

'Ah! A Leninist,' the old man said, while the group looked puzzled.

'Abolish Sunday,' he said. 'We didn't have Sunday two hundred years ago. The British brought it along with them. Wait, let me explain. Fights sanctions by changing categories. You can't drown an amphibian,' he said. 'Also stop reading *Glimpses of World History*.'

**O**nly Govindacharya understood. A guerrilla war of categories. A civilization confronts the rest. A civilization encapsulating a nation state. The old man continued. 'Understand China. Not Pakistan. The latter is still fresh behind the ears. It has no history beyond fifty years. China has Needham,' he added. He was referring to Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China*, a work as huge as the Great Wall. We don't have a set of volumes like that. Only an empire can extract tribute as a labour of love. All India gets are the Naipauls and Nirad C. Chaudhuris and the new adolescents writing about pimples and IAS officers.

An IAS officer is a *patwari*. He is too small-scale. Power should create awe, grandeur. It has a complexity that a village bully or a street goon does not have. And the BJP is still a gathering of *munshis*.

'Smell like a civilization,' he pleaded. 'And that is what is wrong with all of you. When Bill Gates comes, you

drool. When Albright snuffles, you proclaim pneumonia. You live in a state of psychological siege. You act as if you want sanctions, otherwise the world does not know whether you exist.' Pramod Mahajan laughed and then spluttered to a stop. There was a silence around the room, expectant and waiting. The old man, they knew, was warming up.

'Sanctions are good for us. Look at a small state like Cuba. It fights sanctions and lives. The quality of its agriculture has improved. It does not use pesticides and idiot fertilizers. Sanctions help only the object of sanctions. We should use it to switch tracks, create a real state.' He looked sadly at the group around him. What he needed were samurai, not BAS afraid of failing exams. 'Why wait for sanctions? Let us renounce aid ourselves. Why wait to diet, when we should be fasting? Refuse to be a global market. Our markets are big enough to sustain us. Say no to Pepsi, Enron, Coke and watch them panic. They can only blame Clinton. Reverse the process. Confront the amorality of America and say it must face sanctions till Bhopal is paid up for. Capture the ground.'

'You can't bribe a teetotaler with whisky. Alcoholics can't fight sanctions. Think that you are an empire. Don't act like students complaining about a tough exam paper. Change the questions. Change the rules of the game.' There was consternation in the crowd. Someone felt he was not realistic. Suddenly the historian was angry, like milk boiling over.

'Idiots,' he snapped. 'Don't you know that the Machiavellian moment and the Gandhian moment are the same. They demand self-control. There is a *self* in self-reliance and self-control. Who are *you*? What are *your* dreams? True empires are civilizations. You don't build them on punctuation marks. You need men to match

the cosmos. Legislate a different world. Understand power. It has the fury of a waterfall and the delicate accuracy of a titration. Even excess has to be calculated.'

**T**he new princes listened and asked: 'What should we do?' The old man knew they were playing Mahabharata. These were the Pandavas tired of the B+ Bhishmas in the RSS. He wondered if they realized that state formation had altered since then. He repeated for them. 'Stop acting as if you are under siege. Act normal. Feel the logic of empire. Humpty Dumpty did not build the Great Wall of China.'

'Step II. Celebrate. Announce that you are cleaning up the Yamuna. It is a sewer. A ditch. Your sense of power smells of sewage. Let it flow. Let a person driving up to Delhi see the Yamuna flow past Lal Qila. Remember the nuclear bomb is a symptom of our need for power. It is not power itself. We are not yet Japan or Germany. Also know that power needs generosity. It can't thrive on myths of scarcity. Give and give in a way that stuns the world.'

'Give what?' asked the audience.

He ignored the question. 'Have you read Castro?'

'He is a communist,' butted someone. 'Silly,' The old man replied, 'America has made more nationalists into communists than Stalin did. Try to understand the Castro of the earlier period, proud of the revolution, proud of Cuba's work on sugar.' In a speech, he said, 'Who would ever think of patenting Shakespeare or Cervantes? Who would dream of patenting jazz? We declare all research on Cuban sugar free.' That was Castro's imagination. We can go better. We have 40,000 varieties of rice. More than America can dream of. Let us declare our gene plasm as free. FREE. A gift from the greatest community of inven-

tors we ever had, our agriculturists. Let us refuse to recognize all patents on life and many Third World countries will follow. American NGOs will also help. The First World would look silly trying to patent ginger and turmeric.'

'Then, reverse the model in a controlled way on the bomb. Declare that new provisions must be elaborated. A scaling down of weapons must be introduced. Make the Japanese or Germans in charge of the timetable. Ask for the year 2000 as the first target. Insist that the number of weapons be used as an indicator for pollution counts. Insist on a UN tax on it that we too are willing to pay, just like global emissions, and this time the cows won't get in the way. Keep the world guessing.'

'Mahathir got it right when he said usury was wrong. Only he didn't sustain it. So he sounded like a cranky voice in the wilderness.'

'Plan. Move away from petroleum. It is enslavement. Find new sources of energy. Make India the home of alternate energy. Teach the Chinese what a great leap forward is. But to do that you must revitalize your architecture, your rivers, your buildings, and your transport. You can't be a great power on bombs alone. That much Soviet Russia can teach you.'

'Make the bomb the text not the pretext. Teach the Chinese and Japanese a thing or two about civilization.'

**T**he BJP ideologues were embarrassed. They thought the old man was crazy. He nodded sadly and said, 'You are second-rate Americans, like Nehru was a second-rate Englishman. He couldn't stand up to the Chinese. Nor can you.'

'What then,' said a BJP man. 'What do we do?' The answer was distant and final.

'Migrate,' he said.

# Nuclear power and human security

ITTY ABRAHAM

WHERE are we now? At the present moment, there are a number of very real dangers that lie ahead for the people of India and Pakistan. Some have been the stuff of expert commentary, both in the sub-continent and in the West – the possibility of war over Kashmir leading to the use of nuclear weapons, the absence of secure command, control, communication and intelligence facilities increasing the danger of weapons being used in error or miscalculation, the small number of weapons on both sides producing a logic of ‘use them or lose them’, the chance of accidents and mishaps leading to nuclear detonation, the possibility of pre-emptive strikes, and so on. While not discounting any of these and other prognostications, the greater danger in my view is that we get trapped in a conceptual box bearing the stamp, ‘Made in the Cold War’.

As the outlines of an explicitly nuclear South Asia take shape, the only thinking that seems possible comes from the experience of the Cold War. We see this in a number of ways: recounting the similarities and differences between the India-Pakistan relationship and the USA-USSR as a way of explaining why nuclear conflict is more or less likely in South Asia, borrowing strategies and ideas that are supposed to have reduced tensions between the superpowers, or more insidious, the USA offering incentives to India and Pakistan not to go further down the nuclear road which replicates the unequal international structure of that period. But why is mimicking the Cold War experience the correct path to take?

Do we really want to end up where the USA and Russia are now – with thousands of missiles still pointed at

each other, with merely a small number of warheads removed from missiles still in their silos, with nuclear weapon armed submarines still cruising underwater, with arsenals still stacked with nuclear tipped artillery shells, with new sub-critical and hydrodynamic testing facilities coming into being, with testing ranges still open and ready for use, with thousands of nuclear scientists still employed by weapons labs? How can an end like that seem like a solution? To which problem is it a solution?

**T**he seduction of the Cold War (and its 'end') is what unites the glee of Indian right-wingers who have now found their masculinity and the cold-blooded approval of the votaries of 'political realism', both here and abroad. The conclusions they draw from an uncritical acceptance of a particular understanding of the political history of the last half century can be reduced to these: For the realists, nuclear weapons provide the ultimate security of the state, and a stable condition can be achieved between nuclear rivals through the import of the logic of deterrence. For the formerly emasculated, every country desires nuclear weapons because countries with nuclear weapons are the ones that count. India's destiny lies in possessing nuclear weapons because it is a great civilization. Are these statements as self-evident as they are made out to be?

It is easy to dismiss the presumptions of the raw nationalists of the right. First, it is a logical fallacy to assume that because all the present permanent members of the Security Council have nuclear weapons, possession of nuclear weapons will entitle any country to a permanent seat on the Council. The world now measures international influence in other ways. Second, not every country desires nuclear weapons. Two countries in a

somewhat similar position to India and Pakistan, Brazil and Argentina, recently gave up their fairly well developed nuclear programmes. It is not a coincidence that this was done at the moment when the military regimes that had dominated both countries for much of the post-War period finally returned to their barracks.

South Africa's former apartheid regime did the same – renounce nuclear weapons – in its historic transfer of power to the black majority. But, it could be said, perhaps these are special conditions. What about Australia and Sweden, both of which had active nuclear programmes, but gave up the search for weapons in the 1950s? What about Japan and Germany, both of which have large scientific communities and who sit on large stocks of fissile material: neither show signs of developing weapons programmes. What about the other 40 countries around the world that could do it but have not? There is no truth to the assertion that those who can do it, will, or that international acclaim and respect follows those who are acknowledged nuclear powers.

**R**emember that during the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty negotiations, the nuclear powers were forced by non-nuclear countries to accept the importance of Article VI – the demand that nuclear powers work toward general disarmament as a condition of the treaty's indefinite extension. Recall also the international fury that ensued when France blithely set sail toward the South Pacific to run a series of nuclear tests before signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: the reaction so shocked the French establishment that they hurriedly cancelled their last few tests claiming they had all the data they needed.

What about the 'realists' who want to copy the actions and rhetoric

of the nuclear powers? The condition that is supposed to have prevented war between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War is based on the horror of the destructive potential of these weapons. Whether for those who believe what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 was so terrible that it should never happen again, or for the nuclear strategists who believe that no government would be so irrational as to risk massive destruction of its own people in order to pursue belligerent aims against another country the present system is built on the premise that nuclear weapons cannot be used. That simple hope is the basis of 'successful' nuclear deterrence between the USA and the USSR/Russia.

**B**ut remember, 'successful' nuclear deterrence does not make conventional warfare less likely. If anything, the historical record shows that the nuclear powers, successfully deterred from dropping missiles on each other, continued to fight each other through a variety of surrogates in Africa, Latin America and Asia for nearly half a century. The price for the Cold War was paid with the lives of black, brown and yellow people – not a sign of success if you lived anywhere other than the USA or USSR. For India and Pakistan, there's nowhere else to go or, nuclear weapons on both sides say nothing about the likelihood of peace breaking out. Rather, the presence of nuclear weapons may make policymakers more sanguine about resorting to conventional and unconventional forms of warfare.

The moral sanction of not using nuclear weapons because of their destructive power is soon trumped by the peculiar form of 'rationality' that becomes the norm for strategic discourse once nuclear weapons are in place. As nuclear war fighting plans

are drawn up, policy-makers are 'rationally' led to make calculations on the basis of the threat potential of relative destruction. Does a destroyed Karachi equate a destroyed Mumbai, or should New Delhi be added in order to make the relative loss to each country the same, they ask each other. Are nine million Indian dead the same as one million Pakistani dead, given the population differentials of each country? That even asking such questions betrays a fundamentally immoral condition is soon forgotten once the rational game theorists and strategic thinkers start ruling the roost.

**W**hat deterrence promises is a condition where an absurdly heightened state of fear is seen to be the only way to maintain the *status quo*: it normalizes pathology. For example, the lesson of the Cuban Missile Crisis is not how tough US President Kennedy was in making the Soviets back down, or how cleverly Krushchev saved Cuba from US invasion. Rather it is how easily a situation like that emerged, and how difficult it was to back away from the crisis. When the measure of international stability becomes an exchange of threats and counter threats, we are always in a state of crisis. As we get deeper into the nether world of deterrence thinking, policy-makers will agonize over whether the signals of threat escalation are being read clearly by the other side. That uncertainty will lead to greater insecurity on both sides as time goes on. And, when the state of security is reduced to the intangible feeling of how willing someone is to push the nuclear button – the reliability of the threat – sooner or later, the button will be pushed.

2

Western-style deterrence thinking is a call for extremists on both sides of the border to come to centre stage, because their threats are more credible

to the other side. When we accept deterrence as the mechanism to keep war from breaking out, we leave ourselves permanently hostage to the whims and fears of men whose names we don't even know, whose mental state is never quite assured, and whose own sense of masculinity is always in doubt. We will not even be told when the two countries go to the brink of war, because national security concerns are at stake. Deterrence thinking helped perpetuate the Cold War; it legitimized the production of more weapons of ever-increasing destructiveness. Deterrence knows no way of ending a hostile stand-off, only its management. Deterrence cannot help us move toward a safer and more secure existence. It must be rejected.

I believe that nuclear weapons and their associated ways of thinking have become internationally sanctioned means for political leaders to avoid dealing with ongoing conflicts, whether real and imagined. The immediate task is to prevent weaponization and deployment in South Asia. But we can only do that if we know where to look and how to understand what we see.

**I**t is necessary to remember that for the most part western strategic thinking followed advances in weapons technology, not the other way around. Contra the sanitized versions of US Cold War history, which make it appear that a grand strategic plan was set in motion after the Second World War to contain and defeat the Soviets, in fact, a far more *ad hoc* system was the norm. Weapons developers and university scientists, driven by huge budgets and a culture of technological one-upmanship, were principally responsible for the shift from a deterrence strategy called 'counter-value', with population centres as principal targets, to 'counter-force' strategies,

a far more dangerous option which could take away an opponent's second strike capability, and thus increase the chances of war.

By their focus on increasing the power, accuracy and efficiency, first of bombs, then missiles, and now lasers and other anti-missile devices, scientists forced the strategists to come up with new ways of rationalizing their technical accomplishments into a new equilibrium of terror. Once new generations of weapons were built, strategists worked hard to develop new iterations of old theories. It would not be inaccurate to argue that the greater foes of arms control between the Soviets and the USA were not each other, but their own scientists and weapons developers. Is it any different in India?

**T**he problem of nuclear weapons is larger than its purported role in international relations. We need to understand, first, that the nuclear crisis in South Asia is part of a larger global crisis, which is the existence of huge arsenals of nuclear weapons in a number of countries. Second, that only domestic pressure will be sufficient to close these nuclear complexes down international treaties are necessary, but not enough. And third, that those who have the most to fear from these arsenals are the domestic populations of nuclear weapon states.

Let me focus on this last point. Nuclear complexes across the world constitute, apart from their destructive potential, a continuing source of danger to the populations that they are meant to serve. We have seen, for the last fifty years and across the world, the cost of nuclear decision-making for popular security and well being. We have documentary proof that US and Soviet nuclear scientists exposed human subjects and soldiers to nuclear radiation, that unprotected casual



labourers were used to clean up radioactive leaks and spills in India, that serious environmental and human disasters were caused by accidents in nuclear power reactors all over the world, that aboriginal people in Australia and native Americans were pushed off their homelands when uranium was discovered there.

**A**t the same time, we hardly know about the means by which highly contaminated nuclear wastes will be stored until safe to dispose off, the extent of genetic mutation and radiation sickness among populations in the neighbourhood of reactors, mines, and testing grounds, or about the huge and scarcely accounted amounts of resources that have been expended on these complexes over the last five decades. It must be noted also that when most of these cases were exposed, the first response of those in charge was cover-ups, stonewalling, denials, and attempts to intimidate and coerce the victims.

These problems are not the result of the actions of a few misguided individuals. The kind of behaviour that the nuclear complexes of the world induce is built into the constitution of modern, large, capital intensive technological systems. The scale, size, and complexity of these systems – from nuclear power stations, large dams, chemical factories and oil supertankers to intercontinental airplanes and their associated sub-complexes of airports, stations, pilots and traffic controllers – bring with them two things. For all their superb engineering and the material ease they make possible, the size of these complexes also entail a scale of destruction and damage that is beyond most imagining; more important, they carry a built-in danger of breakdown and failure due to their very complexity. Indeed, we have developed entirely new notions of risk and uncertainty, in both actuarial and phe-

nomenological terms, in order to cope with the dangers embedded in these systems.

These systems are of technical necessity extremely centralized and hierarchical in organization, involving small numbers of highly trained skilled workers and expert managers to run them. Information flows are carefully coordinated and only run along approved circuits. The difficulty of maintaining this rigorous system requires constant policing of the boundaries of the complex. Endless screens are set in place to prevent the intrusion of extraneous factors: whether environmental or infrastructural. However, due to the complexity of these systems, this policing is directed not towards eliminating all potential sources of disaster, but reducing the inherent likelihood of failure to 'acceptable levels'.

**T**he public is rarely or never consulted about the tradeoffs embedded in the definition of 'acceptable levels' of risk, about failure rates, or international standards of fault tolerance. Rather, once a system is in place, the lay public must be kept at bay for their foolish, uninformed concerns constitute a threat to the ongoing efficiency of the system. Over time, and especially as system failures are limited or managed in-house, the distance between those within and without the system grows. The privileging of scientific expertise produces a sense of infallibility: this eventually becomes a license to claim a superior understanding of the common good. Of necessity, restricting information – secrecy – becomes the standard operating procedure of these systems.

With a number of the more everyday technological complexes, the public has developed an ad hoc consensus for trusting their functions and accepting their costs. At various

moments, especially just following a major disaster – an aircraft crash, tanker spill, or reactor meltdown – the public has been drawn into expert discussions about the conditions under which the functioning of these systems takes place. Even if the public is not polled about its opinions, it is represented in the discussions: as victims of these catastrophes, if nothing else. The interiors of these black boxes become partially visible in a crisis, creating over time a tacit social understanding which helps absorb the fear of their presence. But with the nuclear power complex even that is not possible.

**N**uclear power, apart from epitomizing all the centralized, hierarchical and concentrated tendencies of large technological systems, is always clouded in the public eye because of its association with national security. From its arrival in the world, nuclear power's first association was with massive destruction, a destruction that soon became identified as the defining feature of national security. Since then, even when associated with peaceful uses, as with producing electricity, nuclear power carries with it the trace of its original sin. We know only too well from the Indian experience, public scrutiny is habitually rejected, ridiculed, or denied through the exaltation of expert knowledge, imposition of definitions of risk and efficiency that favour these systems, or by the invocation of larger social interests. The most opaque and powerful of these larger interests is national security.

Where should we go? Even as the BJP government's definition of real and imagined threats to national security is being contested on many fronts, other tasks need to be taken on. The first step to breaking the chain leading to nuclear disaster lies in far greater domestic oversight of the nuclear and

space complexes – India's 'strategic enclave'. The current omnibus legislation that insulates the atomic energy complex from all scrutiny needs to be replaced by more specific, targeted laws that recognize the public's right to know what goes on in its name. Given the Lok Sabha's historic lack of will to take on the task of oversight, an independent commission staffed by judges, scientists, economists and doctors needs to be set up to conduct a complete social accounting of the Indian strategic enclave. This commission must be given access to all official records and data and allowed to conduct its own interviews with those within this enclave as well as affected by it. Apart from informing us what was done with the enormous funds spent on this sector, public accountability for decisions taken over the last fifty years will finally become possible.

These activities must be carried out in conjunction with citizen's groups from around the world, especially in the declared nuclear weapons states. Names of military scientists and weapons developers from around the world must be made public, so as to increase pressure on them to relinquish these activities and to remind them that they are being constantly monitored. Pressure must be exerted on national legislatures to ratify signed treaties. A parallel system of verification of weapons states' treaty obligations by domestic groups with the necessary expertise to carry out scientific studies and publish reports must be created. Countries like China, without internationally credible domestic monitors, must be pressured to permit teams of international observers from non-nuclear weapons states to verify treaty compliance. This set of linked activities will not be complete until internationalized, but need not wait until the whole system is in place. The people of India can take the lead.

## Testing the world order

SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN

IN analysing the regional and international dynamics of India's decision to test five nuclear devices on May 11 and 13 this year, it is important to bear in mind exactly what changed and what did not. The fact that India has nuclear weapons was already more or less an open secret. Though the country has had a civilian nuclear programme since soon after Independence, it was only in 1964 that its potential military 'spin-off' was officially acknowledged. In that year, Homi Bhabha made a statement – in response to parliamentary questions

about China's first nuclear test at Lop Nor – that India could assemble a nuclear weapon in 18 months if the need should so arise. In 1974, the Indira Gandhi government conducted a so-called 'peaceful nuclear implosion' at Pokhran, in reality a simple fission bomb.

**W**hile the decision to 'go nuclear' was apparently held in abeyance after that, most foreign analysts and governments assumed India had embarked on a dedicated weapons programme in 1988.<sup>1</sup> The open development of ballistic missiles like Prithvi and Agni – which have little military value other than as delivery systems for nuclear weapons – added to this sense of certainty about India's intentions. Thus, those governments with a vital interest in the regional and global proliferation of nuclear weapons – Pakistan, China, the US, Russia, France and Japan – had already begun to factor India's arsenal into their strategic calculations. Pokhran II only served to validate these widely held beliefs.

Likewise, it has been an article of faith for India's strategic elites that Pakistan has had a full-fledged nuclear weapons programme for more than two decades. Moreover, many Indian and western analysts have assumed Pakistan has been in possession of fully assembled nuclear weapons for at least a decade. With the testing of Pakistani nuclear devices at Chagai some two weeks after Pokhran II, this belief would also seem to have been proven correct.

Insofar as the *stated* rationale for nuclear weapons in both India and

1. Revelations by K. Subrahmanyam and others involved with Indian nuclear policy in the wake of Pokhran II confirm that 1988 was in fact the year the weapons programme began in earnest. See his 'Evolution of Indian Nuclear Option' in *Strategic Analysis* (forthcoming).

Pakistan is 'minimum deterrence',<sup>2</sup> it is reasonable to surmise that the same was already operating in the bilateral context since well before Pokhran II and Chagai. Of course, the non-falsifiable and circular logic of deterrence – the absence of nuclear conflict despite the possession of nuclear weapons by two adversaries is sufficient proof of the validity of the theory – would suggest Pokhran II and Chagai cannot be explained with reference to that rationale alone. Moreover, since (according to the Indian government) Pakistan's nuclear capabilities have been created by China and, therefore, are fully known by it, Beijing would be extremely foolish to assume New Delhi did not possess a similar – if not more advanced – weapons capability. Thus, deterrence, such as it is, was already operating on the Sino-Indian plane as well and the absence of nuclear conflict between India and China since 1964 (when China unveiled its nuclear weapons and India acknowledged its capability) or at least since 1974 is sufficient 'proof' of that fact.

**I**t is difficult logically to sustain the claim that Pokhran II was necessary to make the already existing state of deterrence (or 'existential deterrence') more robust and, at the same time, cling to the doctrine of 'minimum deterrence'. In fact, like the concept of deterrence itself, 'minimum deterrence' is a chimera. For if qualitative weapon enhancement – which

2. Virtually no mainstream advocate of the nuclear option in either India or Pakistan has developed maximalist rationales for the Bomb like the Cold War doctrines of mutually assured destruction (MAD) or pure warfighting. The fact that these have not openly been articulated in the South Asian context, however, does not mean they are totally absent. See James H. Lebovic, *Deadly Dilemmas: Deterrence in U.S. Nuclear Strategy*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990, for an assessment of these doctrines.

is what sets apart Pokhran II from Pokhran I – is a *sine qua non* of credible and dynamic deterrence, it is inevitable that governments ceaselessly will seek more precise, well-honed nuclear devices that are superior to those possessed by their adversaries and whose only utility would be as first-strike weapons. The experience of the Cold War arms race, and the technological history of nuclear weapons and of their cognate – ballistic missile defence – clearly proves that deterrence is not stable or autonomous but requires continuous ratcheting-up.

**T**his preliminary excursus on deterrence was necessary in order to better appreciate the motives behind Pokhran II. To sum up the argument so far, the stated, *passive* rationale of wanting to deter Pakistani and Chinese nuclear weapons cannot fully account for the Indian government's decision to test. Rather, there must have been an *active* reason. New Delhi's decision openly to go nuclear – and the reaction of the US, China and others to this – can only be understood in the context of the Indian ruling elites' ambitions on the world stage.

The nuclear tests were a proactive declaration of intent, the issuing of notice that India has every desire of emerging as a big power and will not confine its ambitions to the regional theatre. It is an expression of the Indian states' rejection of both a unipolar world dominated by the US and a multipolar world which excludes Indian big capital from the division of the spoils. At the same time, this does not mean India will be able to sustain such an ambition in economic terms, or even that it is unwilling to play along with this or that power in order to further its own interests regionally and globally. Indeed, the BJP-led government's initial pronouncements holding China

responsible for its decision to test – articulated directly and in Prime Minister Vajpayee's 'explanatory' letter to US President Bill Clinton – were intended to signal a willingness on its part to sign up for a loose US-led alliance against Beijing.

**I**n the event, the government seriously miscalculated, for despite the acrimonious debates in US political and intelligence circles about the wisdom of President Clinton's China policy, the national consensus there favours the 'engagement' of Beijing rather than its isolation or explicit containment. In the long term this view may change, but for the present US capital is too committed to China to envisage the kind of rupture India would like to see in Sino-American relations.

As far as China is concerned, Pokhran II has affected it at two, inter-related levels. Not only has New Delhi's proclamation of nuclear status been read as a claim to a greater role in the world – this is something Beijing might have lived with – but the explicit identification of China as the 'other' suggests this claim is being advanced at the expense of the Chinese. Thus, while Beijing's response to the first set of Indian nuclear tests on May 11 was rather muted, there was a marked difference in the tone and thrust of its official statement following the May 13 explosions. It is self-evident that the change was brought about by the revelation of the contents of Vajpayee's letter to Clinton – in which the Chinese threat was alluded to.

The issue of Chinese missile and nuclear proliferation to Pakistan deserves careful analysis and is not something which should be brushed under the carpet by critics of the Indian government's nuclear or China policy. As a big power with hegemonic regi-

onal and global ambitions, China's outlook and policy is not very different from, say, the US. Proliferation to Pakistan serves several important objectives, especially in the post-Cold War world. First, it ensures the loyalty of Islamabad, desirable as an end in itself and as an entry-point for making inroads into Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> Second, it helps confine a potential rival like India to a narrow, South Asian context. Third, it provides crucial leverage in the strategically important region of West Asia, especially when taken together with its sales of M-9 missiles to Iran and CSS-2 missiles to Saudi Arabia.

**I**ndian analysts often tend to forget that Pakistan sits astride the sea lanes out of the Persian Gulf and that this fact of geography has played a vital role in US calculations about Pakistan's strategic value.<sup>4</sup> For China, the same logic applies. In October 1991, President Yang Shangkun visited Iran – the first visit by a Chinese head of state – as well as Pakistan, in a tour which was seen by western analysts as aimed at building a 'strategic consensus' against the post-Desert Storm US dominance of the Gulf. The Chinese side noted the similarity of views 'on many international and regional issues' while President Hashemi Rafsanjani was quoted as saying Iran rejected the US-dominated new world order and its attempts 'to interfere in

3. The Central Asian consideration may not be as important as is commonly assumed given China's success in politically engaging several Central Asian republics via the 'Shanghai process' and the signing of a major oil deal with Kazakhstan by which China will start to access the region's energy resources by pipeline.

4. Recently, Hamza Alavi has reminded us of this point by tracing the origins of Washington's pro-Pakistan tilt in the Cold War to the uncertainty of Iran's reliability as an ally following Mossadegh's nationalisation of oil in 1953. cf in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, no. 25, 20 June 1998.

other countries' internal affairs by simply accusing them of developing nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> As for Pakistan, Yang's visit was significant because it came so soon after Washington's decision, as mandated by the Pressler Amendment, to terminate military aid to Islamabad because of the latter's nuclear weapons programme.

**W**hile it is doubtful China has provided nuclear weapons technology to Iran – the latter is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is subject to full-scope safeguards and has repeatedly been certified as weapon-free by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – there is little doubt that it has proliferated technology and materials to Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> Most of this collaboration took place after Pokhran I in 1974 and before China signed the NPT in 1992, but some transfers have taken place since. The US has deliberately failed to make a determination to this effect mainly because of its inability to do anything about it. This display of US powerlessness has obviously caused consternation and disbelief in Indian official circles. For India, however, there is little strategic difference between a wholly indigenous Pakistani nuclear weapon, a purloined one or a gifted one.

So long as Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons were kept behind a veil of official denial or obfuscation, the US did not fret too much. The mild response of the US to the 'covert' nuclearisation of Israel, India and Pakistan all these years – in contrast

5. See Lillian Craig Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris, London, 1993, p. 258.

6. See William E. Burroughs and Robert Windrem, *Critical Mass: The Dangerous Race for Superweapons in a Fragmenting World*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994, pp. 60-90, for a fairly credible account of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme.

to its reaction to Pokhran II and Chagai – seems to suggest Washington makes a distinction between ‘quiet’ and ‘loud’ proliferation. Even though the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) marked a turning point in US policy and suggested Washington’s patience with nuclear hold-outs was running out, there were no strident demands for the two countries to renounce their weapon option by signing the NPT. This has now changed. Not only did the US and the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council make this demand in a joint communique on 4 June 1998, but the full Security Council meeting the next day also passed a resolution to that effect (UNSCR 1172).

**R**esolution 1172 is the first explicit reflection of the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests on the plane of international law and represents a disturbing watershed in at least two important ways. First, it is unprecedented insofar as it urges India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT and NPT. Adherence to the NPT has been raised before by the Security Council only in reference to Iraq (eg. UNSCR 687, the Gulf War cease-fire resolution) but then Iraq has been a party to the treaty since 1968 and could be expected to conform to its obligations.

The case of India and Pakistan; however, is different. It is a common precept in international law that countries cannot be forced to sign treaties they do not wish to and that the obligations of treaties cannot be applied to non-signatories. Apart from Article 34 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), which states that ‘a treaty does not create obligations or rights for a third State without its consent,’ Articles 2(4) and 2(7) of the UN Charter also guarantee non-coercion and non-intervention. Thus, there is a compelling case for consid-

ering the Security Council demand for India and Pakistan to accede to the two treaties to be *ultra vires*.

**T**he second questionable aspect of Resolution 1172 is its linkage of the Indian and Pakistani tests to the omnibus notion of ‘threats to peace and security.’ Thus, even though it is not enforceable, some of the language of the resolution is reminiscent of Chapter VII of the UN Charter and could conceivably be used for future enforcement action should a consensus or majority in the Security Council emerge. At any rate, this is the first time that a UN resolution has considered the ‘proliferation’ of nuclear weapons (rather than their possession or use) to be a threat to international peace and security.

The only precedent is the Security Council presidential statement issued after its summit-level meeting in January 1992, in which two paragraphs were devoted to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and, specifically, to nuclear proliferation. The context, of course, was the aftermath of the Gulf War against Iraq and the heightened sensitivity of the US towards the possibility of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons falling into the hands of an adversary.

That statement, which India also signed in its capacity as a non permanent rotating member of the Security Council said: ‘The proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction constitutes a threat to international peace and security. The members of the Council commit themselves to working to prevent the spread of technology related to the research for or production of such weapons and to take appropriate action on that end.’<sup>7</sup> Even though India lamely justified its acceptance of this sweeping and motivated assertion by making

a distinction between vertical and horizontal proliferation,<sup>8</sup> the real aim of the statement’s instigators was never in any doubt.

James Leonard, a former US ambassador to the UN, has said that the Security Council statement is sufficient to give non-proliferation the status of a customary norm of international law, binding on all states whether or not they are signatories to the NPT. He said: ‘It could pretty well serve as the text of a Security Council resolution in which the Council would go on record as saying, “This is now a norm and we intend to enforce it”.’<sup>9</sup> Resolution 1172 of 5 June 1998 is a step in that direction. Certainly the US, Britain and Japan would have liked some threat of enforcement but stopped short of this goal only because of the opposition of several non permanent members from the developing world, as well as Russia.

**A**s a regime, the NPT was a product of the bipolar era. The treaty opened for signature in 1968 and came into effect in 1970. At the same time, even though its drafters could not have anticipated the momentous changes ushered in by the end of the Cold War, its architecture has proved to be remarkably enduring and has continued to dominate the contours of the emerging world order. The purpose of the NPT as far as the US, Soviet Union and Britain were concerned was to make sure no more countries (other than France and China) went nuclear. It was an attempt to lock in place the balance of power as it existed on 1 January 1968, and make the emergence of new challengers to the seemingly stable bipolar division of the world that much more difficult.

8. UN Doc S/PV.3046.

9. Quoted in Siddharth Varadarajan, ‘Playing Monopoly: The Nuclear Club Wins NPT Extension’, *Frontline*, 2 June 1995.

7. UN Doc S/23500 of 3 January 1992.

As Eric Chauvistre has noted, 'the NPT was originally aimed at West Germany and other western states that were considering the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Only later did the focus shift to Third World countries.'<sup>10</sup> On the same day that Germany acceded, the then British foreign secretary, Michael Stewart, conceded that, 'the whole future of the NPT had been dependent on the position of the Federal Republic.'<sup>11</sup> The German debate on the NPT was bitter and divisive, with Franz-Jozef Strauss, the defence minister from the ultra-conservative Christian Social Union, declaring in 1965 that the NPT would be the equivalent of 'a new Versailles of cosmic dimensions.' When in November 1969, Germany finally signed the NPT it made its accession conditional on a number of factors, such as the continued existence of NATO and its right to withdraw at extremely short notice in the case of an 'emergency', before even the mandatory three month waiting period.<sup>12</sup>

One of the legacies of this original aim of a non-nuclear Germany was the stipulation – inserted at the insistence of Bonn and Rome – that the NPT would last only 25 years, unless renewed. This legacy was overcome on 12 May 1995, when the state-parties to the NPT voted to extend the treaty indefinitely and unconditionally. This decision was taken even though the five nuclear weapon states had shown themselves to have been manifestly disinterested in keeping their side of the NPT bargain, namely undertaking

to disarm in accordance with Article VI of the Treaty.

Another legacy of the NPT's original aim is that INFCIRC/153, the document governing the IAEA's right to conduct inspections in non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS), is today considered by the US to be too weak. The IAEA's rights had been limited so as to encourage West Germany, Japan and Italy to sign the NPT, but Washington would now like to broaden the scope of inspections to make them more intrusive. Many countries fear this will make their sensitive military sites vulnerable to international (mainly US) espionage.

The 1993 controversy over the IAEA's demand for 'special inspections' in North Korea based on alleged evidence collected by satellites and other National Technical Means of the US was an attempt to retrofit the Agency with vastly expanded powers. Since the 1994 'Framework Agreement' between the US and North Korea led to the IAEA ending its insistence on 'special inspections' and Pyongyang suspending its notice of withdrawal from the NPT, a lid was put on the crisis without the issue of the IAEA's powers having been resolved.

Nevertheless, the US has succeeded in innovating a parallel inspection instrumentality – the UN Special Commission for Iraq (UNSCOM) – which reports directly to the Security Council and not to a more representative body like the IAEA Board of Governors. Secondly, it has also managed to legitimise the use of National Technical Means, both in the case of Iraq and for purposes of verifying the adherence of state-parties to the CTBT.

If the indefinite and unconditional extension of the NPT legitimised in perpetuity the possession of nuclear weapons in the hands of five nuclear weapons states, the CTBT – which the

US alone out of the five has championed steadfastly since 1994 – sought to build on that regime in two vital ways. First, by asking countries to forswear nuclear tests, it was a way of getting the nuclear hold-outs (India, Pakistan, Israel and Cuba) to sign the NPT by the back door and make the latter treaty even more water-tight. Second, by allowing for sub-critical tests and computer simulation of new and improved fourth generation nuclear weapon designs – a field in which US expertise was far ahead of any other country – it gave Washington an advantage in enhancing its arsenal.

As Christopher Paine has argued, 'a comprehensive test ban by itself will not prevent additional nations from acquiring a basic fission weapon in the 1 to 30 kilotonne range (that goal can only be achieved by a worldwide ban on the production, acquisition and transfer of weapons-usable fissile material). But a test ban would severely limit the ability of current undeclared nuclear states, and future proliferant states, to develop optimised pure fission weapons, and compact boosted fission and two-stage thermonuclear weapons of vastly greater yield, for ballistic and cruise missile delivery. And depending on its scope, a CTB could inhibit further engineering development by at least some nuclear powers of a class of very-low-yield nuclear weapons "specifically designed for tactical use in regional conflicts – the so-called mini nukes" – deployment of which would be a major, perhaps fatal blow to non-proliferation' (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

The CTBT's scope, of course, was finally fixed at a zero yield and excluded so-called hydrodynamic tests. Only the US, and arguably France, therefore, have the unambiguous capacity to

13. Christopher E. Paine, 'Issues in the Test Ban Negotiations', in *The United States*,

10. Eric Chauvistre, 'The Future of Nuclear Inspections', *Arms Control*, Vol. 14, No. 2, August 1993, p. 51.

11. Quoted in Matthias Kuntzel, *Bonn and the Bomb: German Politics and the Nuclear Option*. Pluto Press. London, 1995, p. 124.

12. See on this period Kuntzel, *op cit.*, and Jeffrey Boutwell, *The German Nuclear Dilemma*. Brassey's. London, 1990.

refine their arsenals purely on the basis of computer codes and simulation. China reluctantly accepted the asymmetry this implied so long as it could lock in place the asymmetry on the Sino-Indian and Sino-Russian planes. As for the US, Chinese doctrine continues to believe in the value of a limited deterrent, at least for the moment. A second line of defence for China was its insistence on the controversial Entry-into-Force clause – requiring India's accession despite its stated objections to the treaty – in order to delay the CTBT from coming into effect.

**W**ashington's multi-billion dollar Stockpile Stewardship Programme is aimed precisely at developing new nuclear weapons in the post-CTBT world. As Paine argues: 'This is a programme that goes beyond maintaining the six or seven proven weapon designs currently planned for retention in the enduring nuclear weapons stockpile under a CTB. The intent appears to be to preserve the "core" of the current nuclear weapon design capabilities of Los Alamos and Livermore through "an increased level of effort" in computer simulation and weapons physics research using a series of large-scale experimental facilities, most of which have yet to be constructed, and could ultimately entail an investment of several billion dollars. In the words of David Sharp, a Los Alamos weapons scientist, "we have to learn to design weapons on the basis of better computations, better modelling, and the testing of components." Some of these proposals come perilously close to what might be characterised by some as a deliberate programme to offset, and thereby evade, the intended restrictive effect

*Japan and the Future of Nuclear Weapons.* Carnegie Endowment, Washington, D.C., 1995. p. 101.

of a CTB on the ability to design and certify the performance of new nuclear weapons.'<sup>14</sup> In a July 1998 report, the US-based Institute for Energy and Environmental Research has said that the US is now focussing its attention on developing pure fusion weapons – which do not require fissile material or explosive testing outside the controlled environment of a laboratory. The institute's scientists argue that the research programmes of the National Ignition Facility (under construction at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory), the joint US-Russian laser experiments at Los Alamos, and the wire-array z-pinch device at the Sandia National Laboratory are solely weapon-oriented, as is France's Megajoule laser near Bordeaux.<sup>15</sup>

**R**egardless of what decision India takes on signing the CTBT in the post-Pokhran II era – and there are compelling reasons on either side – it is important to realize that the CTBT has nothing to do with disarmament or with reducing the salience of nuclear weapons in the military strategy of the US or any other nuclear weapon state. On the contrary, the NPT-CTBT apparatus is aimed at ensuring the perpetuation of these weapons as instruments of domination and terror.

Both the Clinton administration's August 1993 report to Congress on its test ban policy as well as its sanitized Nuclear Posture Review released in 1994 continue to be couched in the Cold War discourse of 'extended deterrence'. Other documents, declassified in recent years, speak of newer rationales for the use

of nuclear weapons, especially 'mini nukes', 'micro nukes' and 'tiny nukes' in battlefield situations or for deterring an adversary from using weapons of mass destruction against the US or its allies in any part of the world. These include the US military's Doctrine for Joint Operations and the US Navy's Stratplan 2010.<sup>16</sup>

**T**o summarise, by ensuring (i) the NPT's indefinite extension; (ii) a CTBT with enough of a loophole for improving its own weapon designs; (iii) an expanded scope for intrusive inspections; and (iv) the treatment of non-proliferation as a customary norm of international law at the UN, the US has assembled for itself a political and legal framework it hopes will make permanent its military-technological superiority over all other countries. Central to this is the retention and refinement of nuclear weapons and the centrality of nuclear blackmail as the last resort guarantor of hegemony.

'Of all the potential weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, biological and chemical,' writes Glenn C. Buchan in a RAND organisation study, 'nuclear weapons still remain the most militarily useful and the most spectacular as terror weapons. Thus, if WMDs continue to proliferate in the world and possessing them has any value either as a deterrent or a war-fighting instrument, nuclear weapons are still the best choice, particularly for an "established" nuclear power such as the US.'<sup>17</sup>

Of course, such a dispensation is guaranteed to be unstable. As it is superseded by economic and political

14. Ibid., p. 104.

15. Arjun Makhijani and Hisham Zarriffi, *Dangerous Thermionuclear Quest: The Potential of Explosive Fusion Research for the Development of Pure Fusion Weapons.* Takoma Park, MD: IEER, 1998.

16. See Hans M. Kristensen and Joshua Handler, *Changing Targets: Nuclear Doctrine from the Cold War to the Third World.* Greenpeace International, Washington, D.C., 1995.

17. Glenn C. Buchan, *US Nuclear Strategy for the Post-Cold War Era.* Santa Monica, RAND,

developments, this framework is bound to appear unreasonable and highly rigid to different countries at different points of time. Already, multiple challenges to US power are emerging around the world, such as the establishment of the single European currency (which will eventually rival the dollar), the crisis in the Middle East peace process, the failure of 'dual containment' in the Persian Gulf, Sino-Russian detente, and so on. So long as economic and political rivalries remain dormant or below some threshold level, treaties like the NPT and CTBT present an illusion of stability, of the permanence of 'US leadership'. But when these contradictions cannot any more be contained within the old arrangements, they inevitably lead to tectonic shifts in the global balance of power.

**T**he secret Pentagon strategy documents, 'Defense Planning Guidance Scenario Set' and 'Defense Planning Guidance for Fiscal Years 1994-1999', leaked to the press in February and March 1992,<sup>18</sup> suggest the US is not unaware of future challenges to its pre-eminence. Indeed, the threats factored in go far beyond the 'rogue doctrine' propounded by the Bush administration in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Thus, it was suggested that Germany and Japan, besides Russia and China, could emerge as potential superpowers and rival the US in military terms. Though the two documents were disavowed and later replaced by sanitized ver-

sions in which all uncharitable allusions to potential rivals were expunged, it is obvious that the US is planning for a world which is robustly and even antagonistically multipolar. And one of the keys to managing such a world is to preserve, as far as possible, the basic architecture of the NPT, CTBT, and the proposed Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty.

**W**ithin this scheme of things, India's nuclear tests are seen by Washington as a dangerous challenge to the very relevance and rationale of the NPT. And so they are. Not only has Pokhran II shown the NPT to be obsolete and anachronistic – which was already known – but it is also an invitation for other countries to test the treaty's limits. Pakistan followed suit two weeks later and there the present phase of 'proliferation' has come to an end. Israel, the only other non-signatory to the NPT with an undeclared nuclear arsenal, has given no indication of wanting to move away from its long-standing policy of ambiguity (i.e. 'Israel will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East').

Nevertheless, it would be naive to think that Pokhran II and Chagai will not have repercussions elsewhere. Countries which gave up their nuclear weapons option on the understanding that no others would develop them are bound to think again about the usefulness of their decision. In the region, Iran might feel threatened by Pakistan's nuclear weapon and feel compelled to develop its own. Another scenario, though less likely, is for Pakistan to pass the nuclear baton on

to Iran. And in other regions too there are likely to be knock-on effects. In that sense, the Pakistani tests are seen by the US as especially destabilising. If there was a marked hardening of Security Council and G-8 attitudes after Chagai, this was mainly because the 'demonstration effect' of Pakistan's tests on nuclear threshold states in the region is considered to be much stronger than India's. The latter's image as a global player is, after all, not really in dispute. For the US, the most worrisome scenario stemming from the Indian tests is the possibility that China may resume testing. That is why it accords utmost importance to both India and Pakistan signing the test ban treaty without delay or conditions.

**O**ne US analyst has described a scenario where 'an overt North Korean or Indian nuclear weapons programme might also encourage other states in the Middle East and East Asia to pursue a nuclear option. Indeed, should several middle ranking powers acquire nuclear status, countries such as Japan and Germany would feel real pressure at least to rethink their current policy of nuclear self-denial.'<sup>19</sup> In many US accounts, the nuclearisation of Germany and Japan is the proliferation equivalent of doomsday, for it would, in some sense, mark the formal end of the post-World War II era. Yet, how real is this possibility? Stephen Meyer has characterised the dynamics of the nuclear proliferation process as one of technological-motivational convergence. 'On the whole,' he argues, 'the technological aspect of the process is fairly monotonic over time. It increases both quantitatively and qualitatively as

1994, x. He goes on to argue that submarine-launched ballistic missiles should be the core of the US nuclear force, with bombers as back-up, while 'the US should be out of the ICBM business since they no longer offer any important advantages and they have distinct liabilities.'

18. Patrick Tyler, 'Pentagon Imagines New Enemies to Fight in Post-Cold War Era', *The New York Times*, 17 February 1992, and

'US Strategy plan calls for insuring no rivals develop', *The New York Times*, 8 March 1992. Cited in Michael Klare, *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws: America's Search for a New Foreign Policy*. Hill and Wang, New York, 1995.

19. Peter van Ham, *Managing Non-Proliferation Regimes in the 1990s: Power, Politics and Policies*. Council for Foreign Policy, New York, 1993.



time goes on.' The nuclear motivation of a country, however, can rise or fall depending on 'how the constellations of national and international events and politics develop. As a consequence, any given nation's nuclear propensity may bounce between various levels of weak, moderate and strong.'<sup>20</sup>

**I**n technological terms, both Japan and Germany (and several other countries) can go nuclear with virtually no lead time. In motivational terms, the propensity for either country to go down that path would be directly proportional to the extent of global and regional proliferation and instability, and inversely proportional to the degree of US commitment to 'extended deterrence' via the US-Japan Security Treaty and NATO. A major reason for the US desperation to establish a new role for NATO after the Cold War is the understanding that the dissolution of NATO would be considered by Germany and some other European states as a sufficient compromise of its 'supreme national interests' as to warrant withdrawal from the NPT. Likewise, Washington's reluctance to leave Asia to the Asians is based on its assessment that Japan would then almost immediately nuclearise.

At any rate, important voices have been raised in both countries questioning the viability of the NPT in a changing world. Thus, Erwin Haeckel of the DGAP (the German Society for Foreign Affairs, an equivalent of the IDSA) has argued that 'in the circle of the great powers... probably in the foreseeable future some actors (Japan, India, the European Community...) might come onto the stage who have neither the privileges of being permanent members of the UN Security Council nor enjoy being

acknowledged as established nuclear-weapons states... How to overcome this difference in status is not clear... but one should not put off considering the idea that some of these new great powers might contemplate making a legitimate claim to nuclear weapons. The NPT would be forced to face a terrible dilemma, a dilemma with apparently no way out.'<sup>21</sup> In the academic literature, the possibility of German and Japanese 'Gaullists' pushing for independent nuclear arsenals is increasingly being considered.

**I**f geo-strategic considerations and hegemonic ambitions are the main motivational factors for any country to acquire nuclear weapons, the myth that nuclear deterrence provides a perpetual guarantee against the danger of conflict is the single biggest ideological smokescreen that they can hide behind. As long as this myth is sustained by US nuclear strategy and substantiated by its perpetual possession of nuclear weapons, other countries—especially those with global aspirations—will almost certainly acquire them.

One of the imponderables that advocates of deterrence have to grapple with is that the logical conclusion of their doctrine must surely be that 'more is better' and that proliferation of nuclear weapons (in a controlled and gradual manner) will actually help to prevent conflict throughout the world. Indeed, neorealists like Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer have argued this seemingly absurd position with elegance if not persuasiveness.<sup>22</sup> A typical representative of the 'less is better' school, on the other hand, argues that 'the logic of "more is better" applied to nuclear spread is mistaken because it assumes that the decision for or

against nuclear war is a rational calculus based on a comparison of costs and benefits coolly evaluated. It is more likely that a decision for or against nuclear first use will be one of desperation or inadvertency, not one based on calculation and deliberation.'<sup>23</sup>

**O**f course, the use of nuclear weapons in desperation or inadvertency was as much of a danger for the Cold War adversaries as it is for any other possessor state. On several occasions, the accidental launching of nuclear weapons was averted in the nick of time. The paradox is that deterrence is actually predicated on the possibility of such accidents since 'the implementation of ever more stringent measures to prevent the accidental use of nuclear weapons would in most cases impair the credibility of a country's nuclear deterrence position.'<sup>24</sup>

On the whole, it is difficult to disagree with Van Creveld's assessment that 'much of the western literature on proliferation appears to be distorted, ethnocentric and self-serving. It operates on the principle of *beati sunt possedentes* ("blessed are those who are in possession"); like the various treaties to which it has given rise, its real objective is to perpetuate the oligopoly of "old" nuclear powers.' Thus, he argues, 'weapons and technologies that used to be presented as stabilising when they were in the hands of the great powers were suddenly described as destabilising when they spread to other countries.'<sup>25</sup> In reality, these weapons were destabi-

23. Stephen J. Cimbala, 'Nuclear Weapons in the New World Order', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2.

24. Louis Rene Beres, *Mimicking Sisyphus: America's Countervailing Nuclear Strategy*. Lexington Books, Lexington, 1982, p. 89.

25. Martin van Creveld, *Nuclear Proliferation and the Future of Conflict*. Free Press, New York, 1993.

20. Stephen M. Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, p. 112.

21. Quoted in Kuntzel, *op cit.*, p. 175.

22. See Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*. Norton, New York, 1995.

lising even when possessed by the two superpowers, and the theology of deterrence their strategists peddled offered little succour to the millions of people around the world worried about the danger of nuclear holocaust. Nuclear weapons are not acquired for deterrence but for the hegemonic value they confer as currencies of power. In the South Asian context, even if overt nuclearisation combined with the doctrine of deterrence does not lead to atomic war, it is likely to delay indefinitely the prospects of normal state-to-state relations between India and Pakistan. The premise of deterrence is the possibility that a nuclear first strike might one day happen despite the irrationality of such a strike in military terms.

**B**ut as Cori Dauber argues, 'the problem is that worst-case analysis can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies regarding international relations... in which there is no real place for discourse. Even as summits, meetings, negotiations and other forms of discursive communication are increased, they are dominated by a perspective that believes these activities to be side-shows.'<sup>26</sup> In other words, talk is cheap. It is only weapons that really matter. So long as Indian and Pakistani elites remain possessed by the deterrence mindset, they will be locked into a situation where negotiations on substantive issues are considered unimportant. And the same applies to Sino-Indian relations as well. What needs to be grasped is that it is friendly relations, and not nuclear weapons, which provide the most durable security.

Where does all this leave us?  
The nuclear tests have heightened ten-

sion in South Asia. They have not served to enhance the national security interests of India and Pakistan, either in the broad sense of the well-being of the population or even in the narrow sense of state security. True, Pokhran II has not led to the kind of isolation of India the US and China would like to see internationally, mainly because of popular revulsion against the hypocrisy of the five nuclear weapon states. But nor have there been any expressions of solidarity with New Delhi. Nuclear weapons have been flaunted in order to assert a claim to a larger global role but it is not certain that the tests have given Indian elites the kind of clout they desire. If India stands a chance of truly making its mark on the world stage, it can only do so by making a clean break with the 'big power' mindset that has gripped it since the days of Rajiv Gandhi or even earlier.

**T**he world is sick and tired of nuclear-armed, big powers throwing their weight around, intervening wherever they feel like and imposing their will on small countries. The world does not need another big power of this kind. If India simply wants recognition as a nuclear weapon state, it will be reviled in the world. If it challenges the unequal world order in order to make it genuinely democratic, it will win respect and adulation. As for Washington, it will have to reconcile itself to the fact that the challenges to its 'non-proliferation regime' will only mount over time, especially since the US dominance which this regime is meant to symbolise and underpin is steadily being eroded by economic and political developments. Either it agrees to disarm, as the world is demanding, or else it will hasten the day when a devastating nuclear conflict eventually will break out.

# Living a nuclear life

ZIA MIAN

THE government's of Pakistan and India have thought and done the unthinkable. With the nuclear weapons tests they have demonstrated a willingness and a capability to commit nuclear mass murder. They are now not simply murderous states but genocidal ones.

This was not done with universal consent. There was a nuclear debate. But there should have been no need for one. Nuclear weapons have become the one great exception in the sense that

there are some issues that a society should never need to debate because the issue itself is so unethical.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, however, the moral response has been dulled. This is because the question is never posed in moral terms. It is easy to do so: is it right or wrong to be prepared to kill hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people in the blink of an eye, to maim many more and to poison them with radiation so that they die slowly and painfully over

3:

the years from cancers and other illnesses. The experience of Hiroshima should have been enough to convince anyone that there can only be one decent answer to this question: nuclear weapons are an affront to humanity.

**S**o why has there been a worldwide debate about nuclear weapons for over fifty years? It has happened in large part because the reality of nuclear weapons is presented in the language of security, strategy and technology. The issue is framed as one of deterrence, compellence, first-strike, second-strike, counter-force, counter-value, primaries, secondaries, pits, tampers, yields, throw-weights, CEPs. Each word, each idea, points only to another in the same language, and in this language there are only reasons and numbers. These are further detached from reality by renaming things; the US nuclear war-fighting plan is called the 'Single Integrated Operational Plan', the MX missile is called the 'Peace-keeper'. In all this, there is no word for man, woman, child, pity, remorse, or even death.

From the very beginning of the nuclear age there has been a tendency to use language that hides the reality of what is being considered. But it is more than simply a disguise. Language is used as an anaesthetic, as a way to deaden feeling. Without feeling, morality becomes an abstraction and withers away. These are the first casualties of nuclear weapons.

Nowhere is this more evident than among those people whose job it is to deal with these weapons on a daily basis. The American scientists who built the first ever nuclear bomb simply called it the 'Gadget', as if it were just another strange invention rather than the most destructive weapon that had ever been made. When the time came to kill people with these

weapons, the scientists and soldiers involved found the most innocuous names possible for the weapons: the bombs that destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were called 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man'.

This refusal to confront the reality of nuclear weapons is not confined to the United States. It has afflicted every state that has developed them. The Soviet Union named its first bomb the 'Article'. Britain called its first nuclear explosion 'Hurricane', France had the 'Blue Mouse', and China named its first nuclear weapon simply 'Device 596'. The same escape can be found closer to home; India christened its nuclear bomb test in 1974 'Smiling Buddha' and more recently 'Shakti'. All of this illustrates what psychologist Robert Jay Lifton has called 'nuclear numbing', the process by which 'we domesticate these [nuclear] weapons in our language and attitudes. Rather than feel their malignant actuality, we render them benign.'

**P**akistan has its own way of talking about its nuclear weapons without really talking about them. For more than a decade, while it lacked a nuclear bomb that it could name, the debate in Pakistan was only about a 'nuclear option' or a 'nuclear capability'. There was never a mention as to what it was an option for. So used are Pakistan's scientists to a nameless bomb that they have not yet given a name to the nuclear tests.

If the nerve of moral outrage is only dulled, there is hope that the sharp prick of knowledge can serve to revive it. Laying out the enormity of what is involved in Pakistan's nuclear tests can serve this purpose. Pakistan is believed to have tested a simple nuclear weapon of the kind used 52 years ago against Hiroshima. In Hiroshima, the atomic bomb killed between

210,000 and 270,000 people and destroyed more than 90% of the city. Pakistan's nuclear tests were a demonstration that it could do the same thing to one or more of India's major cities.

Despite the moral argument against nuclear weapons, there has been public support in the countries that have built these weapons. This is not because people woke up one day and wanted nuclear weapons. Public support for them was built by creating a sense of crisis and fear. There is no doubt about the overwhelming elite support for nuclear weapons in Pakistan and that this is shared by large numbers of ordinary people. The nation-wide celebrations of Pakistan's nuclear tests are sufficient proof. This level of support, according to opinion polls, has not changed for over a decade. This is remarkable. In one of the most tumultuous periods in Pakistan's history, where military dictatorship gave way to elected government, governments came and went, economic policies changed, the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the United States imposed sanctions on Pakistan because of its nuclear weapons programme, nuclear weapons have remained almost beyond question.

**T**here are many reasons behind this massive and inert support for nuclear weapons. One is that most people know little if anything about nuclear issues. This is an obvious inference from polling data showing that support for nuclear weapons in Pakistan is constant regardless of educational attainment. From the illiterate to those having only a basic education to those with degrees, about the same proportion support these weapons. That the nuclear debate is starved of information is evident one only has to look at newspapers, magazines and the electronic media.

What people are told is rarely more than an assertion that nuclear weapons are vital. This is a second reason for the strong and enduring support for nuclear weapons. For over a decade, Pakistanis have heard nothing but repeated public declarations by all their presidents, prime ministers and military leaders that nuclear weapons were vital for the 'national interest'. When arguments are presented in this manner it is no surprise that people conclude the nuclear weapons are Pakistan's last and only hope. It is this that explains Nawaz Sharif's remarks on Pakistan television after the tests; he said it was an 'auspicious day' and the decision to test was 'a crossroads... [with] one way towards slavery, the other towards freedom.'

**I**t is not just an abstract support for nuclear weapons that is created. Pakistan's politics and culture is too charismatic and physical for that to succeed. Nuclear weapons have been personified. For years they have been embodied in A.Q. Khan, who led the uranium enrichment project used in the making of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. He has become a national public figure, appearing on television and making speeches at all kinds of public events. For the head of what is meant to be a secret military project, this has few precedents anywhere in the world. Others have now joined him from the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission.

A fourth reason for the support to nuclear weapons is that the opposition has been stifled. For years, there has been a deliberate orchestration of hate in sections of Pakistan's media against individuals and groups who argued against nuclear weapons. This hate is by no means exclusively reserved for them, but its intensity is remarkable. To take only one example, in February 1996 the Islamabad branch

of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy held a public meeting. It sought to suggest, with what now appears to be great foresight, that Pakistan should not engage in a nuclear or missile race against India. The following day, Urdu newspapers responded with banner headlines: 'People's Forum meeting: ridiculous speeches poking fun at Islam, abusing armed forces.' Within a few days this had turned into headlines declaring: 'Organisers of non-governmental dialogues between India and Pakistan are not patriots.' And then, politicians jumped in to add that this was a case of treason, and if the government would not act to prosecute such traitors, people should take the law into their own hands. After the tests, some people did. On 2 June, at a press conference in Islamabad, members of the Forum were attacked.

**M**ost of all, nuclear weapons need an enemy to make them worthwhile. For decades, India has been projected as an absolute and unremittingly hostile enemy, without scruple, willing to exploit every opportunity. It is the source of everything that has gone wrong in Pakistan. An Indian hand is identified behind every untoward event. Any challenge to the *status quo* is interpreted as an Indian conspiracy against national security. India, it is said, cannot be talked to or reasoned with; it must be confronted.

This is the environment within which the nuclear tests took place. Having created a public opinion obsessed with nuclear weapons, it was only too easy for Pakistan's leaders to claim that they had no choice and that it was public opinion that demanded the tests. It was easy and may have sounded convincing. It should not have. Public opinion in Pakistan has demanded many things like an end to poverty, schools for their children,

hospitals, but no leader ever risked the future of the state to try to provide these.

The cost of a nuclear weapons programme is far greater than simply the withering of morality and the corruption of language and politics. The financial costs are great; this is why they are kept secret. In Pakistan, even estimating the cost is difficult. Part of the problem is that disentangling the money spent on the nuclear weapons programme from that spent on the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) is practically impossible. That they are tied together is indisputable. As he doled out credit for the nuclear test, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said, 'The entire nation takes justifiable pride in the accomplishments of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, the Dr. A.Q. Khan Research Laboratories and all affiliated organisations.' Incidentally, for PAEC this was illegal. It is bound by its charter to work only on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

**A**t a more material level, many of the nuclear scientists and engineers who worked on the bomb programme must have received their training at the PAEC, and are seconded from it. There are apparently 'seven thousand highly skilled and professional people, including more than two thousand Ph.Ds, M.Phils, MSs, MScs, BScs at Kahuta. Similarly, the uranium that is mined and processed at Dera Ghazi Khan has been used by both to make fuel for the KANUPP nuclear reactor in Karachi and to make nuclear weapons material at Kahuta. Since the nuclear power plant at Karachi is dangerous and old, and has only produced a fraction of the electricity it was supposed to, it is possible to imagine that it is kept open as no more than a fig-leaf for the nuclear weapons project. In which case a large share of the PAEC budget,

greater than the Rs 6 billion budget of PAEC over the last two decades, may have directly or indirectly subsidised the nuclear weapons programme.

To these costs must be added the military spending in Pakistan, part of which also subsidised the nuclear programme. In this year's budget, military spending has been set at Rs 145 billion. This is 40% of what the government expects to receive in taxes, and 30% more than what has been allocated for development. For the record, 1990 was the last year in which military spending was equal to the budget allocation for development.

**T**he effects of persistently lower than necessary development spending is cumulative. Each generation which is deprived of decent healthcare and housing, education and employment, is less able to provide these for the generation that follows. There is a spiral of underdevelopment. That this is at work in Pakistan is evident from the fact that on the United Nations Development Programme's aggregated measure of the quality of people's lives in different countries, the Human Development Index, Pakistan has slipped from number 120 in 1992, to 128 in 1995, to 134 in 1996, and in 1997 was ranked 139 (and is now below India).

To all this must be added the direct and indirect cost of the sanctions imposed on Pakistan in response to its nuclear tests. This may amount to billions of dollars of aid and loans. Frankly, much of this would have been squandered and used to enrich the already wealthy and provide them with even greater comforts. But at least some would have gone to supply water, perhaps build schools, hospitals, roads – something that would have helped.

It is unclear how long sanctions will remain in force but even when

they are lifted, Pakistan will only be back to where it is now. The fact is that to begin creating the conditions within which real development can take place will need massive reductions in military spending. Such reductions cannot, however, take place as long as India is treated as a threat requiring nothing less than a willingness to use nuclear weapons against it and, in response a willingness to have nuclear weapons used against Pakistan. If national nuclear suicide is being offered as the only way to confront India, any reduction in military spending will be seen as subtracting from national military capability. It is only by engaging in nuclear disarmament, and so demonstrating that relations with India are not being interpreted as issues of life and death for the nation, that it will become possible to debate military spending.

**T**he whole process of creating and maintaining even a small nuclear weapons arsenal like Pakistan's exacts a terrible toll on people's health and on the environment. There is increasing evidence from around the world that from the moment uranium is dug out of the ground to the disposal of long-lived radioactive waste that is dangerous for tens of thousands of years, the materials that form the essential ingredients for nuclear weapons bring with them sickness and death.

The first public evidence of the human and environmental damage done by the nuclear programme has already emerged. It is to be found in Dera Ghazi Khan, the site of Pakistan's first, and for a long time its only, uranium mining and processing operation. Officially part of the PAEC, this is also where workers mined the uranium that went to Kahuta to make nuclear weapons. In 1996, the 500 or so workers at the plant went on strike, demanding 'payment of compensa-

tion to the heirs of the employees [who] died during their duty or became handicapped, provision of all necessary safety measures both at the plant and at the site, and sacking of the doctor and lady doctor of the PAEC dispensary, as due to their incompetence several employees lost their lives.' The government's response was draconian. Newspapers reported that 'Security guards of PAEC and other law enforcing agencies have besieged the colony and all installations. No one is being allowed to enter or come out of the area.'

**T**hat the first strike over health and safety issues in part of Pakistan's nuclear complex broke out at Dera Ghazi Khan is not at all surprising. Uranium is both radioactive and poisonous; handling it in any form is fraught with risk. But, unlike in a laboratory where highly trained scientists who know the risks involved may handle tiny amounts of such dangerous material with relative safety, the mining and processing of uranium ore is an industrial scale operation. Its labour intensive character leads to exposing large numbers of relatively unskilled workers, who know little about the short or long-term risks that they are being subjected to. The dangers to health are substantially increased in such a setting.

Briefly, the process of turning the tiny amounts of uranium found in some rocks into large amounts of pure uranium that can be used to make fuel for nuclear reactors or for nuclear weapons requires that huge amounts of rock need to be dug out of the earth, pulverised into dust and chemically processed. The uranium ore emits radiation and exposes anyone close to it even before it is taken out of the ground. Digging up the ore releases radioactive gases that are trapped inside the rock, adding to the risk. The

ore has then to be crushed and the waste rock removed. The crushing produces a radioactive and poisonous dust that can be inhaled, that settles on clothes, in hair, and on the skin. Because it is so fine, it is blown by the wind and settles in the surroundings – on grass, leaves, and water – contaminating everything.

**U**ranium mining, in the first stage, leaves behind as waste over 99% of the rock in which the uranium ore is located. This contains most of the radioactivity and many toxic heavy metals as well as the acids and alkalis used to extract the uranium. These can leach into the soil and groundwater. Because it is generally processed away from the mines, the ore has to be transported to the processing plant. This is often done after the ore has been substantially crushed and some of the waste rock removed, leaving less material that needs to be transported.

If the ore is transported in open trucks, the uranium dust may well be blown around *en route*. Once at the processing plant, the rock is further crushed and ground. But even though the total amounts of material are now smaller than at the mine, the risks of inhaling even small quantities of dust are larger. The impact on the uranium miners and the local environment of such waste is enormous.

The dangers do not end here; they just move on to another site. The next step is transforming the uranium into a gaseous form that is suitable for enrichment at the Kahuta facility. This involves the use of highly corrosive and toxic chemicals that react violently with moisture in the air and are fatal if inhaled. Once the uranium is enriched and can be used to make nuclear weapons, it leaves behind a radioactive, toxic and corrosive waste. This waste comprises almost

all of the initial material and needs to be disposed off safely. It is usually stored as cylinders of gas at the enrichment plant, but these will eventually degrade and lead to an environmental disaster.

There is no information about what has happened at the Kahuta plant with regard to health and safety issues or how the waste is dealt with. The US, which invented many of the processes and technologies used in making nuclear weapons, is still struggling to come to terms with this kind of waste from its nuclear weapons programme. A 1997 report claims that the giant steel cylinders containing this waste gas are so radioactive that even the dust that forms and then falls off the outside is treated as 'dangerous waste'. The cylinders, despite being over one-third of an inch thick, have corroded, and some leak, and 'every time one leaks, as some have, it releases puffs of toxic gas and uranium that can end up in the groundwater.'

**P**akistan also has a new nuclear reactor at Khushab, on the banks of the Jhelum river. Its sole purpose is to produce plutonium for making nuclear weapons. If this reactor has an accident it could pollute the entire Indus river with radioactivity and thus poison irrigation and drinking water drawn from it. Even if there is no such catastrophic accident, the process of extracting the plutonium from the fuel after it comes out of the reactor, known as reprocessing, generates large amounts of dangerous radioactive waste. The US Department of Energy, responsible for making US nuclear weapons, has estimated that reprocessing accounts for 85% of the radioactivity released in the nuclear weapons production process, 71% of the contaminated water, and 33% of the contaminated solids.

These wastes are so dangerous that they need to be stored safely for at least 1,000 years to make sure they do not get into the environment.

As long as Pakistan retains its nuclear weapons, it will need to keep at least some of these sites open. If, as seems plausible, it starts to increase the size of its nuclear arsenal, more and more sites will become part of the nuclear weapons complex and more communities exposed to the dangers of radioactive waste. These dangers, and any accidents that may occur, will most certainly be kept secret.

**I**t is only by renouncing nuclear weapons that damage can be stopped. The sooner this is done, the less chance there is of more workers being exposed to radioactivity and of further damaging the environment. Once this is done, there will be no need to keep these places secret. The process of assessing the harm that has already been done and cleaning up the mess can be started.

To those who want to keep nuclear weapons, the moral, political, economic and environmental destruction wrought by making and keeping nuclear weapons are outweighed by the supposed strategic guarantee of national sovereignty that the bomb provides. They argue, as Nawaz Sharif has done, that everything pales besides the need of the nation to live with self-respect; he claimed that now, 'Pakistanis are a self-respecting and honourable people who can sacrifice their lives to protect their honour and dignity.' The question for all those who support nuclear weapons is: Where is the self-respect, honour and dignity in thinking about and being willing to kill hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people? What kind of *self* is it that needs such destruction as a mark of respect?

# Coping with nuclear reality

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN

THE Indian nuclear tests of 11 and 13 May 1998 showed New Delhi's determination to force itself into the 'exclusive club' of nuclear weapon states (NWS). Pakistan replied in kind on 28 and 30 May as a show of its own ambition to achieve parity with its arch rival. In forcing entry into the exclusivity India played according to the membership rule of the club, i.e., *might is right*. Pakistan followed the same route.

The tests were received in both countries by unprecedented national

euphoria and pride, although as subsequent events showed, these did not take long to dissipate. Thanks to the 'patriotic' fervour which equates the bomb with national prestige, the common Indian and Pakistani ignored common sense and joined the elite – politicians, intellectuals and other professional cheerleaders in celebration. India has apparently chosen to give up its patents on non-violence and *panchshila*. The tests even led to an enthusiastic reinterpretation of Gandhian non-violence as something for the brave and not for cowards, claiming that India would now be able to take a strong stand before the world

\* The views expressed are the author's own and may not necessarily reflect any official position.



community.<sup>1</sup> Immediate popular reaction in Pakistan was equally jingoistic, if not worse.

It is not known if the Indian shift, followed by Pakistan's, from a long-standing position of nuclear ambiguity to the present status of self-proclaimed NWS, followed careful consideration of the strategic, political and economic costs compared with advantages of ambiguity. Be that as it may, the reality today is that India and Pakistan have become the first two in a line of contenders to the nuclear club.

The gravity of the new strategic situation in South Asia and the risks involved in the brinkmanship that both have indulged in needs no great elaboration. What should be recognized at this critical stage is the gap between the desirable and the possible. What is most desirable is a roll-back to the pre-May 11 situation – which is rather unlikely. What is possible is to find ways to prevent a further worsening of the situation and to learn to live with the reality.

The reason a roll-back scenario is considered unlikely is simple. Pakistan would rather 'eat grass' than renounce its nuclear option unless India does so, and India would not do so before China and other NWS make definite progress towards complete elimination of their nuclear weapons. Whereas Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme is a direct response to India's, the latter's nuclear ambition is only partially addressed to security threats from within or outside South Asia. It is to a greater extent linked with the global nuclear weapons problem.

To be sure, notwithstanding India's long-standing advocacy of global nuclear disarmament, its nuclear

aspiration has been carefully nurtured throughout the post-independence period. The international role that a state strives to play is essentially a function of its power capabilities and its elite's perception of such a role. In case of India too, its perceived destiny and capacity as a 'great power' has shaped New Delhi's foreign and security policies and actions. Genuine or not, proud of India's power potential – physical size, population, economy and resource base, industrial and technological strength, strategic location, democratic institutions, historical past – the Indian elite has always aspired for a great power role.

India's leading initiatives in the non-aligned movement were to a great extent guided by its aspiration to play a role of global importance. Nehru was a great exponent of non alignment; he also gave expression to this perceived great power role of India, though it was often masked in moral language. In the words of Nehru: 'India will always make a difference to the world; fate has marked us for big things.... Leaving the three big countries, the United States, the Soviet Union and China aside for the moment, look at the world... if you peep into the future... the obvious fourth country in the world is India.'<sup>2</sup>

The reference point for India is not only its neighbourhood but the great powers. Nehru was a genuine supporter of nuclear disarmament. But he also inspired successive generations of Indian political leaders not to accept any status lower than of those with whom India considers itself at par. Recall that it was Nehru who approved the Indian plutonium reprocessing capacity to make available the

plutonium used for the 1974 peaceful nuclear explosion.

It was under Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri that India insisted on creating an independent nuclear industry base. Indira Gandhi ordered the PNE. Under Rajiv Gandhi, the research reactor Dhruva was commissioned which provided the source of weapons grade plutonium. Under Narasimha Rao, a nuclear test was reportedly to take place in December 1995. I.K. Gujral, notwithstanding his gestures for peaceful relations with neighbours, was not known for any particular opposition to India's nuclear weapons programme. Hence, what the present Hindu fundamentalist BJP-led government has done is a culmination of a process of continued activity by all previous governments. This was confirmed by leaders of the BJP as well as other political parties, including former Prime Ministers I.K. Gujral and H.D. Deve Gowda. The latter claimed that it was a result of cumulative efforts of the last 45 years and a matter of timing.<sup>3</sup>

Arguably, the speed at which the BJP-led government went ahead with the tests surprised many analysts and experts. One obvious explanation for the timing could be the problems that the coalition government faced in holding itself together. Judging by the reaction of Indians from all walks of life, there is no doubt that the tests gave it a badly needed breathing space, though, as expected, it didn't take long for its political allies like Jayalalitha to resume her act. But beyond that, India's nuclear aspiration as an instrument to ensure its long-standing desire to emerge as a power of global importance is nothing new. The present government only decided to go ahead with greater speed than expected.

1. *The Hindu*, Madras, 20 May 1998.

2. Quoted from Baldev Raj Nayar, 'A World Role: The Dialectics of Purpose and Power', in John W. Mellor (ed), *India: A Rising Middle Power*. New Delhi, 1981.

3. *The Hindu*, 15 and 20 May 1998.

Prime Minister Vajpayee, indeed, echoed Nehruvian determination to achieve major power status when he said in Parliament: 'India is now a nuclear weapon state. This is a reality that cannot be denied. It not a conferment that we seek; nor is it a status for others to grant. It is an endowment to the nation by our scientists and engineers. *It is India's due, the right of one-sixth of humankind*'<sup>4</sup> (emphasis added).

It is important to realize that Indian security, its strategic concerns and objectives are both regional and extra regional, that New Delhi is not prepared to accept being a nuclear outcast as long as other contenders for a global role have the weapon in their possession. From the Pakistani standpoint, the Indian position is a convenient excuse to pursue its nuclear weapons programme.

It is widely believed that international sanctions on India and Pakistan would not cause a major collapse of their economies, especially the former. As recent reports suggest, in the case of Pakistan, sanctions can indeed deal its fragile and externally dependent economy a devastating blow with severe implications for political stability of the country. But the linkage of nuclear capacity with national pride not only accounts for the emotions at the national level but could also render the financial and other costs bearable. On the other hand, the countries that slapped the sanctions, particularly the United States, are already showing a realization that these are not cost-effective from their point of view either. Hence, like it or not, the task ahead is essentially a question of how to live with the

reality of the nuclear threat in South Asia.

What lies ahead? Quite clearly, the effort of the international community to arrest the spread of nuclear weapons has failed. The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan also threaten the relevance of the NPT, irrespective of whether or not it is possible to renegotiate the treaty and increase the number of the nuclear weapon states to six or seven or more. The dilemma is that the parties to the NPT cannot ignore the implications of the emergence of new nuclear weapons states, even as they find it difficult to open the treaty for renegotiation.

Since the tests, India and Pakistan have sent signals that they may be willing to negotiate signing of the CTBT, though India has expressed that it would join only under conditions that have not yet been specified. Most of the NWS have, however, urged them to do so unconditionally. Notably, much of the initiative taken by the international community concentrates on India, the understanding being that if and when India is persuaded, Pakistan will follow suit. If India asks for changes in the CTBT and NPT, it would obviously pose a difficult dilemma which the international community must be prepared to face.

While by joining CTBT and possibly signing a no-first use agreement, India and Pakistan could avert further international condemnation, such developments would at the same time imply the gradual international acceptance of the new reality. Indeed, the NWS, especially the US, may find it convenient to maintain a stable relationship with India and Pakistan with a proven nuclear weapons capability rather than confront them. Notably, a study conducted for the US Air Force by the Rand Corporation, widely con-

sidered as the Pentagon's think-tank, suggested in March 1998 that the Indian subcontinent may be the one rare exception where regional security may actually be enhanced by tolerating some level of nuclear weapons proliferation. Arguing that the US had few incentives to offer that could obviate the desire of the regional states for nuclear weapons, the study recommended that the US might find it worthwhile to tolerate some movement on the part of the South Asian states toward low but relatively stable levels of nuclearization, if that is seen to enhance local stability.<sup>5</sup>

International efforts to confront the South Asian nuclear question should proceed with a premise that contrary to prevailing western perception, any country that has achieved technical expertise to produce nuclear weapons should also be expected to have the skills and political acumen to manage this capability, with or without weaponisation. Not everything has been lost as yet. Fortunately, by all indications, South Asia still appears to be far from the doomsday scenario as both India and Pakistan are still way behind actual weaponisation and deployment.

If nuclear tests by India and Pakistan are an indicator of the future, it must be remembered that nuclear non-proliferation and test bans cannot be pursued in isolation from nuclear disarmament. The international community requires firm, unequivocal and time-bound commitment on the part of NWS to eliminate nuclear weapons leading to global nuclear disarmament. The Canberra Commission declared: 'Nuclear weapons are held by a handful of states which insist that these weapons provide unique security benefits, and yet reserve uniquely

4. 'Suo moto statement by Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Parliament on 27th May, 1998,' circulated by the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka, para 10.

5. Quoted in *The Daily News* (Colombo), 23 March 1998.

to themselves the right to own them. This situation is highly discriminatory and thus unstable; it cannot be sustained. *The possession of nuclear weapons by any state is a constant stimulus to other states to acquire them*'<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added).

Whatever may be the stated compulsions, the Indian and Pakistani tests provide clear evidence of the validity of the above statement. The Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996 issued by the ICJ stated with reference to Article VI of the NPT: 'There exists obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.'<sup>7</sup> The Canberra Commission identified a series of specific steps for global nuclear disarmament. One possible way forward in the present context is that India and Pakistan unconditionally agree to sign the CTBT and freeze their nuclear programmes at current levels without further weaponisation or deployment for an agreed period, while during this agreed period the five NWS should also come up with a specific commitment on a timetable for global nuclear disarmament.

**T**he most obvious implication for South Asia is that a totally new strategic situation has arisen where the possibility of a nuclear disaster will always remain real. The peoples of the region have been brought closer than ever before to the brink of disaster. The smaller countries of the region have been thrown into a state of helplessness and despair. The prospects

of improving trade and economic relations between India and Pakistan within or outside the framework of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), about which there were high expectations recently, have been shattered. Any notion about economic ties working as a confidence building measure in the region has now been rendered irrelevant.

**W**hether or not the region faces a direct nuclear catastrophe, there will certainly be a balance of terror. An indication of this was provided in the way the smaller states of the region responded to the tests. Countries like Bangladesh and Maldives reiterated their commitment to a nuclear weapon-free world, but refrained from making any direct comment on the Indian and Pakistani tests. Sri Lanka went to the extent of almost fully endorsing India's 'right' to conduct the tests. It did so largely because of an incapacity or will to antagonize India. The concern that it would be penalized in its bilateral relations should it take a stand not liked by India, no doubt shaped its reaction.

But it also did so because of an absence of any legally binding international instruments. There is no assurance from the nuclear weapons states that they will not attack or threaten to attack a non-nuclear weapons state (NNWS) with nuclear weapons, as well as assurances of coming to their defence if someone does so. The absence of such an instrument is particularly unjustified after the historic advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons will be contrary to international law. The Indian and Pakistani tests have once again underscored the need to redouble international efforts towards a universally binding international legal instrument to provide specific

and complete security assurances to non-nuclear weapons states.

At the regional and international level, all eyes are focused on the Colombo summit meeting of SAARC, which is expected to provide the first opportunity to the prime ministers of India and Pakistan to meet and discuss ways of reducing tensions. However, if any movement in that direction does take place in Colombo, it will be on the sidelines of the SAARC agenda which cannot include discussion on 'bilateral and contentious' issues.

Be that as it may, the summit could turn out to be a disappointment for those expecting a dramatic breakthrough. Neither India nor Pakistan will come to the summit for any love of regional cooperation. If anything, their objective will be to avoid being seen as the one responsible for jeopardizing the SAARC process, not that they have not already done so. In all probability the meeting will be remembered as another round of rhetoric. Realistically, one possible outcome could be for the two to resume their stalled official level talks.

**T**o be sure, there have been instances in the past where the two used the opportunity of the SAARC meeting to discuss bilateral disputes. They may, indeed, do so this time too, but it is doubtful if they will go beyond the usual verbiage and polemics. When India approved the dates for the summit there were signals that New Delhi would like to see the summit concentrate on economic cooperation, as though having conducted the tests India and Pakistan are now mature enough to shelve political differences for the sake of economic cooperation. It would be ideal if they decided to do so. Unfortunately, while desirable it is unlikely. But the real message from New Delhi was clear: Don't raise anything for deliberations under SAARC

6. Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, *Report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons* (Canberra, August 1996, p. 7).

7. Quoted in Jayantha Dhanapala, A Strengthened Review Process for the NPT, paper presented at an international seminar held in Kyoto in December 1996.

that can be classified as bilateral and/or contentious.

For its part, Pakistan demanded that SAARC should address the tensions resulting from Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests. Islamabad cannot be unaware that any attempt in that direction will be opposed by India's 'religious' adherence to the policy of bilateralism. On an optimistic note, the SAARC forum could help the two realize that the nuclear tests and the ensuing unprecedented war of words, can only do harm and no good to themselves and to the rest of the region.

**T**he smaller countries of the region can take the opportunity of the Colombo summit, especially their meetings in 'retreat', to clearly voice their concerns and provide a more specific response to the problem. As mentioned earlier, fearful of the implications in bilateral relations, their initial reaction to India-Pakistan tests have been hesitant, to say the least, though subsequently some initiatives were taken to articulate their position.

Maldives made the first genuine expression of concern when the situation arising from the tests was cited as the reason for the postponement of President Gayoom's proposed visit to Delhi and Islamabad as the outgoing SAARC chairperson.

The prime minister of Bangladesh was the first head of government to visit India and Pakistan after their nuclear tests. Early reports on visit suggested that Bangladesh proposed exploring ways of easing tensions between the two. In separate letters addressed to her Indian and Pakistani counterparts, she wrote, 'I would be very happy to visit your great country at an early date to discuss the situation arising out of the nuclear tests...' A section of the me-

dia in Bangladesh reported that the possibility of mediation was also considered.

Talking to the Overseas Correspondents' Association of Bangladesh, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reportedly said that she had 'offered a proposal for mediation to ease tension caused by nuclear tests by India and Pakistan.' Eventually, the visit proved to be anything but mediation. It was not unknown to Bangladesh that mediation was the last thing that would be acceptable to New Delhi on any matter of dispute. Nevertheless, the message of Bangladesh's concern as a small neighbour was clear, as was its eagerness to play a pro-active role in promoting dialogue and reducing tension between the two.

**T**his needs to be followed up severally and jointly by the South Asian NNWS. In the interest of regional stability and cooperation, NNWS of South Asia should strive to take a more active role on the issue. They should consider a sub-regional South Asian initiative – within or outside the SAARC process – to prevent nuclear weaponisation and deployment by India and Pakistan.

The SAARC, the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and other international fora should be used to persuade India and Pakistan to sign a binding legal instrument to ensure security guarantee for NNWS of South Asia against use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by any NWS, especially their regional neighbours. This provision should, indeed, be built into a no first use agreement that may be signed between India and Pakistan, and future confidence building measures aimed at promoting regional stability.

# A view from Nepal

KUNDA DIXIT

IF there was political fallout from the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, it did not reach the Himalaya. The Nepalis seemed more concerned about the occupation of a Himalayan valley called Kalapani on its north-western border with India by the Indian military and the alleged movement of border posts on the eastern frontier. For many Nepalis, brought up to believe that India's rulers have always been plotting to Sikkimise Nepal, the border issue reinforced the stereotype. Kathmandu newspaper headlines screamed obscenities at 'imperialist' India and political parties vied with each other for more virulent anti-Indian statements. The bombs were tested in the middle of this controversy. All it really did was give Nepalis a feeling that they were now dealing with a newly-nuclear India.

The Foreign Ministry in Kathmandu issued a mild expression of concern about the nukes while the leader of the ruling Nepali Congress, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, said he was glad India had finally tested the big one because 'a strong India is good for Nepal.' When Pakistan tested its bombs, Bhattarai was asked by reporters whether a strong Pakistan was good for Nepal too, and he seemed to be uncharacteristically at a loss for words. Indian President K.R. Narayanan happened to be in Kathmandu on a state visit while all this was going on; there were some peace supporters who took to the streets and raised slogans outside the Indian Embassy.

Other than that, or the punditry in the op-ed pages and predictable vehemence from regular India-baiters,

there was no real outrage, no sign of a movement for regional disarmament, no revival of the discredited panchayat-era call for Nepal to be declared a 'zone of peace'. If there was any reaction, it came in comments about the extreme bad taste and insensitivity to carry out the tests on Buddha's birthday. Nepal may be a 'Hindu Kingdom' but the Buddha was born in what is now Nepal and nearly one-third of the population is Buddhist. A headline in the Kantipur Nepali daily seemed to sum up the mood: 'Earthquake, not nuclear bomb, more dangerous for Kathmandu.'

Much of this ambivalence towards India comes not from fears of 'Sikkimisation' but from the gradual 'Finlandisation' of Nepal by India. Landlocked Nepal's overwhelming economic dependence on India and its close cultural and religious ties have always pushed Nepalis to bend over backwards to assert their independence. Nepal time is symbolically 15 minutes ahead of Indian Standard Time – it used to be only 10 minutes till 20 years ago. The love-hate relationship is seen in many dealings – the paradoxical effort by most political parties in Kathmandu to exhibit their opposition to Indian hegemony during election campaigns, but who immediately retract their vitriol once they come to power, shamelessly justifying it as made 'during the heat of campaigning.'

India itself, and especially its embassy in Kathmandu, hasn't given the Nepalis too many reasons to like India either. An unnecessarily belligerent statement by the Indian ambassador on Kalapani, even while a

bi-national committee was trying to resolve the issue, poured oil on the fires lit by Nepali activists. They marched to Kalapani but were turned back at the barbed wires, said to have been put up on Nepali territory by Indian border guards. Perceived high-handedness by New Delhi is usually magnified by a shrill Nepali press, reinforcing public perception that India is a bullying big brother. The way India has handled the Bhutan refugee crisis, refusing stubbornly to mediate, even though it seems to be in its own strategic interest to do so, has mystified Nepalis. Here is a case of 100,000 Lhotsampas from Bhutan being forcibly moved out to travel through Indian territory to live in squalid camps in eastern Nepal and New Delhi couldn't care less.

**I**ndia does not have to be so mean, and even though magnanimity may be seen as a sign of weakness it can afford a little bit of it – especially if it wins New Delhi the big prize: the possibility of harnessing Nepali rivers jointly for electricity, irrigation and flood control. The Gujral Doctrine was the way to go. But as things turned out, any deal on water issues with India is now doomed. Take the Mahakali Treaty, which was dead on arrival because neither side was prepared to first look at the political reality on the ground. In Nepal, no government (least of all shaky coalitions) will want to commit suicide by talking water with India – so strong is the historical memory of past irrigation projects, and so tempting is it for the opposition to whip up anti-Indian populism. Recent governments have tumbled at even the slightest whiff of 'selling out' to India. As economic dependence on India grows, there will be more gestures to show that Nepal is apart. But the rulers of the day in Kathmandu will have to be much more pragmatic and

gauge the cost-benefit ratio of taunting India for political mileage.

Nepal has in the past always leaned on China to neutralise its dependence on India. But this strategy outlived its usefulness with the India-China détente and the unspoken understanding between Delhi and Beijing that recognised Tibet as a part of China in exchange for everything south of the Himalaya being accepted as India's sphere of influence. But the sabre rattling by George Fernandes and labeling of China as 'threat number one' ended it all. A new trans-Himalayan cold war could revive the geo-political competition between Beijing and New Delhi over Nepal. In the past, Nepal benefited because it had a cool and calculating reigning autocrat like Mahendra, but in a messy democracy it could bring the danger of China and India competing for political influence in the Kathmandu *durbar* by destabilising each other's proxies.

**N**epal's unifying warlord, Prithvi Narayan Shah, knew it 250 years ago as he set about trying to carve out a country that stretched from Sikkim to Punjab. He likened Nepal to a yam between two stones. He was talking about Tibet/China to the north and British/Moghu/India to the south with the thin, long territory of Nepal in between. Nepal's rulers to the present day have retained this doctrine of vulnerability. Another analogy is of a mouse caught between two elephants – if the elephants fight the mouse is trampled; so too if the elephants make love.

Over the centuries, Nepal has tried to deal with this in different ways. Prithvi Narayan's descendants put Nepal on an expansionist mode and immediately collided head-on with a similarly expansionist East India Company. After three bloody wars,

Nepal finally signed a treaty with the Company in 1816 under which Kathmandu paid a heavy price for independence: ceding most its conquered territory, allowing the British to recruit soldiers (later called the *Gurkhas*) and allowing Calcutta to place a regent (actually a spy post) in Kathmandu to monitor and interfere with domestic Nepali politics.

**L**ater, the Shahs were sidelined in Kathmandu by their cousins, the Ranas. The first hereditary Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur, became the first subcontinental royalty to pay a state visit to Britain in 1850. Jung was a pragmatic military tactician and he wanted to gauge the strength of the British and see whether it was worth going to war with them. After visiting the cannon foundries, the naval dockyards and the railways in the British Isles, he decided Britain was too strong to have as an enemy. So Jung became an Anglophile to the extent that he sent his army down to the Avadh plains to help the British out of a particularly tight corner that they had got themselves into with the Mutiny.

British India was happy with having Nepal not only as a buffer state against China, but almost as a vassal state. Nepal may not have been colonised, but who'd know the difference? And the Gurkhas were soon dying in Afghanistan alongside their British comrades – a pattern that continued through the world wars, in the anti-communist insurgency in Malaya, in the 1962 war with the Indian Army against China in Aksai Chin, and most recently in sailing down to the Falklands to mop up Argentinean landmines.

Nepal's relations with Tibet (and therefore China) suffered as a result of the British tilt and some campaigns against Lhasa ended in disaster as the Chinese came to the aid of

Tibet. In one case they even chased the Nepalis back into Nepal and massacred them in a battle north of Kathmandu. The uneasy peace with the North was enforced by the inhospitable nature of the high Himalayan frontier and in the South with the malarial Terai keeping away all but the most adventurous Europeans. The kingdom of Nepal existed in splendid isolation, and as the independence movement gathered strength in India, that is exactly how the Ranas wanted it.

**B**ut Nepali socialists who had socialised in British India began agitating, and it was only a question of time before the Rana oligarchs had to give way to the Shahs who promised democracy. However, independent India learnt early on that it was easier to exert influence in Nepal through its corrupt autocrats than a genuine functioning democracy. Prithvi Narayan's direct descendant, King Mahendra, dissolved Nepal's first democratically elected government and jailed Prime Minister B.P. Koirala in 1961, telling him, 'Nepal isn't big enough for the two of us.' B.P. Koirala, in his recently published memoir, recounts that when push came to shove Jawaharlal Nehru never really supported democracy in Nepal. And when the India-China war broke out in 1962, Mahendra shrewdly exploited India's tension with China and played one off against the other to gain development largesse and political clout.

Not since Prithvi Narayan, and not after Mahendra, has Nepal enjoyed such a degree of self-determination. True, Mahendra gave in to Indian demands, especially on river sharing agreements, but he also allowed the Chinese unprecedented access and got them to build highways and hydro-electric plants. King Birendra came to power trying to carry on his father's legacy. But the world was changing:

US-China rapprochement, the birth of Bangladesh, Indo-Pakistan tensions and an increasing clamour from the underground democratic movement meant that Mahendra's policies needed fine-tuning. Nepal lobbied and won the honour of hosting the SAARC secretariat and played an important part in the early years to try and make it a relevant regional body. But relations with India just kept getting worse with irritants like Nepal repeatedly voting against India at the UN and international fora, or Birendra's 'zone of peace' proposal which New Delhi felt was another case of upstart Nepal acting too big for its boots.

**I**n the end, it came to something as petty as a personality clash between Rajiv Gandhi and Birendra to put Indo-Nepal relations into a tailspin. There are several theories about this: protocol-conscious Birendra demanding royal treatment from Rajiv who saw himself as a Moghul emperor, or Kathmandu's alleged refusal to allow Sonia to visit the Pashupatinath temple during a SAARC summit, or a flap over a breakfast invitation at another summit in Islamabad.

Whatever the reason, New Delhi used the excuse of Nepal buying military hardware from China to clamp an 18-month blockade on its border with Nepal in 1988. For Nepal, with its trade dependence on India almost complete, this was economic strangulation. Nepal started flying in kerosene and petrol from Dhaka in civilian airlines hastily converted into flying tankers. Essential supplies ran out and the public mood turned angry. Looking for scapegoats, the people blamed their own government and as the grievances piled up, it snowballed into the democracy uprising of 1990. In hindsight, India had unintentionally triggered a democratic movement in Nepal.

The years since democracy was restored have been politically messy. Nepali freedom fighters, some of whom went straight from jail to the swearing in ceremony at the Royal Palace, showed themselves to be as self-centred, short-sighted, fractious and venal as the feudocrats they replaced. It did not take long for the euphoria of democracy to be replaced by the stench of political greed. Nepal's long-suffering citizens who had expected political freedom to be a panacea that would erase the effects of past plunder and neglect, bringing the hope of better living standards, were disappointed.

**T**oday, their patience has run out. As elected officials discredit themselves with political promiscuity, and fed up with an uncaring elite, people who have nothing left to lose have in some parts of the country been drawn by the extremist rhetoric of the Maoists. The government in Kathmandu continues to treat the Maoists as a law and order problem and in the time-honoured fashion of reactionaries everywhere, call them 'terrorists'. Unless this is seen as a political problem, an attempt made to bring the extremists to the political fold and to redress past neglect and apathy, support for the Maoists will only grow.

For Nepal, as well as for India and Pakistan, the real threat to national security is from within, from disenfranchised peoples who are fed up with tolerating oppression. South Asia must see human security and not the arsenal of their neighbours as the number one security issue. And unless the two big boys, India and Pakistan, call an immediate halt to their nuclear programmes, de-escalate the arms race and shift the money to development, the real issue will be the poverty bomb and not the nuclear bomb.

# Machismo, madness and a mess

L. RAMDAS

THE recent display of 'nuclear machismo' by the Sangh Parivar and the predictable response from Pakistan on 28 May '98 has left the sub-continent in a state of total dismay and disarray. The chieftains of the fundamentalists on both sides of the border have excelled themselves in jingoism and in threatening each other publicly. The minister for parliamentary affairs in the Government of India challenged Pakistan to a 'duel' as it were, soon after 13 May. This grand, perceived strategic superiority was short lived, for on 28 May the score was 'deuce'. Not to be outdone in jingoism, we had the foreign minister of Pakistan claiming that Pakistan would be able to win a war with India in 90 minutes!

The reasons for India's nuclear tests were ascribed to national security requirements. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the general scene in the immediate neighbourhood just before the elections in February '98 was stable and well under control.

Inder Gujral who was prime minister in the last government confirmed this on the floor of the House during the debate on the explosions. We need to look at all these and related issues to understand the impact of this misadventure.

There has been criticism, perhaps justifiably, that India has never really set for itself a national strategy from which must flow all other related strategies. This was to be the primary task of the National Security Council, to chalk out a 'national vision', examine various issues and to recommend a national strategy – political, socio-economic and military. This would have enabled us to evolve a nuclear strategy. As of now, we have nuclear weapons without a proper nuclear strategy. This is a dangerous situation to be in. Unfortunately, the government decided to pre-empt everything, and by setting off the bombs, made a mockery of the concept of a National Security Council.



National security represents all aspects of national interest which need to be protected, nourished, developed and sustained. Thus, military needs alone do not constitute national security. In the present context therefore, the expansionist militarism of the neighbours, namely China and Pakistan, which have been attributed as the main provocation for the decision to execute Pokhran II is not tenable.

**W**hat changed so dramatically between the time Inder Gujral vacated office and the time the BJP government came into being continues to be a mystery. It is most unlikely that the government made an in-depth analysis of the fallout of this decision. The only reason that may have driven them towards the edge of this precipice was that it would give India a great feeling of glory and power.

The nuclear tests have generated reactions worldwide and on the domestic scene. The overall reaction of the nuclear haves, especially that of the United States of America, was predictably negative. The announcement of sanctions too was equally prompt. Subsequently, the USA prevailed upon the P5 states and the G8 nations, and more importantly the UN Security Council, to condemn India for its action in Pokhran and, to a lesser degree, Pakistan for its reaction in Chagai Hills.

While we may wish to play down the impact of economic sanctions and complain about the discriminatory character of the CTBT, the fact remains that they are a reality. The total impact of all this is just beginning to surface. As was to be expected, most projects which will be affected have a bearing on the socio-economic sector. The list is long and worrying. The sanctions will also create difficulties for business houses in raising funds and loans from international

financial institutions for the many ongoing projects and those on the anvil. To avoid loss of face we may put up a brave front, but the shoe still pinches! Exports are likely to nose-dive in the near future and we may soon face a severe balance of payments problem. Our \$23 billion reserves will become less than half in no time, and that is when the real crunch will come.

The belligerent and aggressive image we have projected post Pokhran II has created a sense of fear in our neighbourhood, which will no doubt be exploited by the 'nuclear haves' and their close relatives! The few friends we have will now be more circumspect, and quite unwittingly we may even have created new enemies. The ASEAN nations, those in the West Asian rim and the Gulf countries will certainly feel uncomfortable.

**I**n short, what we have succeeded in doing is to create fresh security concerns. All this may result in our isolation and encirclement by like-minded nations in our neighbourhood. Clearly, we have brought this avoidable and ugly situation upon ourselves. A country which prided itself on its high moral standing has lost it by a single foolish act of this government. Despite the pronouncements of peaceful intent and dispatch of special envoys, our credibility has suffered badly; to restore our image to pre-May 11 state will take a long time.

Most disconcerting and damaging to our world image has been the recent resolution, passed unanimously by the UN Security Council, demanding and urging India and Pakistan to implement a long list of actions. Mention of items 5, 7, 13 and 14 will illustrate this point.

Item 5. Urges India and Pakistan to resume the dialogue between them on all outstanding issues, par-

ticularly on all matters pertaining to peace and security, in order to remove the tensions between them, and encourages them to find mutually acceptable solutions that address the root causes of those tensions, including Kashmir.

Item 7. Calls upon India and Pakistan to immediately stop their nuclear weapons development programme, to refrain from weaponisation or from the deployment of nuclear weapons, to cease development of ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons and any further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, to confirm their policies not to export equipment, materials or technology that could contribute to weapons of mass destruction or missiles capable of delivering them and to undertake appropriate commitments in that regard.

Item 13. Urges India and Pakistan, and all other states that have not yet done so, to become parties to the treaty on the non proliferation of nuclear weapons and to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty without delay and without conditions.

Item 14. Urges India and Pakistan to participate, in a positive spirit and on the basis of the agreed mandate, in negotiations at the conference on disarmament in Geneva on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, with a view to reaching early agreement.

**T**hese points made by the UN Security Council clearly indicate that the world body will not be inactive and let things slide. In all these years since 1965, the UN had not intervened to highlight Kashmir. Indeed, Kofi Annan was planning to remove it from the UN agenda, but the blasts have

changed all that. The reality is that the UN has now decided to mention Kashmir. The question before us is, can we afford to ignore these demands of the UN?

On the domestic front the anticipated magic did not work. In the recently concluded by-elections, the BJP has not fared too well. The so-called allies have not given them even an inch. Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee and now even the one-man party of Chandra Shekhar are after the jugular of this government. The Congress party has cooled down considerably since its initial supportive stance, and is waiting in the wings to step in. So the domestic political fallout has, if anything, been exactly the opposite of what was perhaps expected by the BJP. The minority government is now struggling to hang onto power!

**N**uclear weaponisation means additional costs to the defence budget. The compulsions will be many. We will need to have excellent command, control, communication, and intelligence systems which will be responsive to the new demands of nukes. We will also require excellent satellite surveillance, airborne early warning (AEW), and air defence and anti-missile missile systems. We will need the delivery systems – aircrafts, submarines, missiles and so on. The net effect of all this will be to further push up defence expenditure.

Needless to say, most of the resources will have to come from those earmarked for the social sector. The nation will now be left with even less resources for food, education, drinking water, health; in short for all those things we have promised our people since independence.

There are many other demands the military posturing will make on the overall economy of the country. The economists will no doubt elaborate on

the implications of the sanctions on exports, industrial growth, and foreign investments and infrastructure development. There is bad news most of the way, and in all probability it is likely to get worse.

**N**uclear weapons have unfortunately been given more credibility than their due in the mistaken belief that their possession automatically bestows on a nation status, power and deterrence. This is an old fashioned concept evolved during the Cold War which has become the *mantra*. Many countries have wisely realised the enormous penalty the possession of these weapons imposes on their economies. South Africa, Brazil, Argentina – all of whom had attained the same levels of technological competence as India in the nuclear field – decided to give up their capabilities. If any one had a good reason to cock a snook at the western alliance and insist on retaining the bomb, it was Nelson Mandela. The wise man knew that issues concerning the development of his people were far more important than possessing the bomb with all its attendant implications.

Let us quickly demolish the 'status' and 'power' theory. Germany and Japan are probably the strongest economies and whose people enjoy a quality of life which is the envy of others. Surely they are powerful nations with a voice which is heard everywhere. Both have done well without the nuke. Japan will, in all probability, join as the next permanent member of the Security Council – a seat we have coveted for a long time. After 11 May we have certainly botched whatever little chance we might have had in this regard. As it is for individuals so it is for nations. Respect has to be earned and cannot be demanded! There goes overboard the theory of status and power. How can we stand

tall and feel proud when even after 50 years of independence we have over 500 million fellow Indians who still live below the poverty line.

We figure as 138 out of 175 nations in the overall rankings in the UNDP's Human Development Report of 1997. Many nations in Asia and Africa figure way above us on this list. To be able to call ourselves the world's number six, we need much more than just nuclear bombs.

Now to address the deterrence theory. We are all aware of the awesome effects of a nuclear war. Not only do we hazard ourselves but the rest of the world too. Weapon capacities, effectiveness and destructive power have grown manifold since Hiroshima and Nagasaki and it is clear that there can be no winners in a nuclear war.

**T**he chances, therefore, are that we will incur all this expense for the development of these weapons only to store them in a 'deep freeze'. What a waste! As a rule, more and more expenses are forced on nuclear adversaries due to an arms race which is inevitable, for the 'military psyche' demands to be one up over his adversary at all times. This is true of conventional weapons and even more so in the nuclear weapons business. The price we will have to pay is enormous. To illustrate this point, the price we paid for each Sukhoi aircraft recently acquired from the Soviet Union was about Rs 175 crore! The project cost Rs 7500 crore. That kind of money is adequate to give drinking water to over 300,000 villages, or build 150,000 primary schools or an equal number of primary health care centres.

Let us take the scenario of nuclear blackmail. Assuming that there was an asymmetrical nuclear equation between us and Pakistan, or

China, did we really believe that these nations would have deployed a few nuclear bombs to settle either the Kashmir issue or the Arunachal border dispute, and not expose themselves in the bargain to radiation and other ill-effects of a nuclear strike? Surely, we have lived through this asymmetry vis-a-vis China since 1964, and with all the other nuclear haves for a much longer duration. We demonstrated our technical ability to explode a nuclear device in 1974. Given this wonderful situation, what then was all this hurry for in May 1998?

**T**here is really a no win situation with or without nuclear weapons for either side. None of our contentious issues is likely to be settled militarily; so what has Pokhran II given us that we did not already have? We might as well have settled for the cheaper option of first organizing our own affairs.

Does this government really believe that with Pokhran II we have deterred the USA which has nuclear submarines armed with deadly weapons deployed in the Indian Ocean, who can if they so desire strike the sub-continent at any time and place of their choosing? They have over ten thousand nuclear weapons – vulgar, yes – but whom are we competing against? We must also be realistic. There is no doubt that the demands made by the P5 states to have exclusive rights to nukes is untenable, but then whatever moral clout we had before 11 May to rein them in has now been lost for good. There was no other means to pressurise the nuclear haves except the moral and ethical; this we have now shed from our inventory.

Much before Pokhran II it was well known to those in power that the border disputes, including the Kashmir question with Pakistan and our boundary question with China,

could not be resolved militarily. With nukes now, it is even more difficult and disastrous to attempt any military adventurism. Common sense tells us that these issues can and must only be resolved by negotiations and evolving a political settlement. Even if Pakistan acts shy, we must take the initiative to demonstrate a statesmanlike, pragmatic and positive approach to discuss these issues and not fuss about dates and venues as we have done hitherto. We must also try to bring some fresh thinking on the subject of Kashmir.

The gamble of 'Shakti' on Buddha Purnima day in May by the BJP-led government has indeed boomeranged. If anything, there has been a considerable deterioration in the overall security environment. The country has now been exposed to a potential nuclear holocaust which could happen due to a misadventure like 'winning a war in 90 minutes' or an accident. The Indian people will have to pay many a penalty – in terms of economic sanctions, reduced outlays in the socio-economic sector, added burden on defence and the challenges of an angry and hostile international community.

**W**e have made a big mistake and landed ourselves in a mess. We must quickly get out of this quagmire by initiating a dialogue with both Pakistan and China, and to resolve outstanding issues peacefully. Most importantly, both India and Pakistan must cap all their nuclear weapon related activities and come to the table. With China, we need to restore the good relations that we had prior to the tests.

Clearly, the way ahead is through dialogue and discussion, not confrontation and conflict. This is the least we owe to our peoples in the sub continent. The alternative is to go down in history as the ones who brought on *Kaliyug* prematurely!

# Do nuclear weapons provide security?

M. V. RAMANA

HAVING a gun pointed at you is an unnerving experience, even if you have a gun pointing at the other person. With the recent tests, India and Pakistan are in a similar situation. They are now certainly targets for the nuclear missiles of all the other nuclear weapon states, as well as each other. This may or may not have been true earlier, but one can be sure it is the case now. It is, of course, not just the populace of India and Pakistan who inhabit the bull's eye. Despite having thousands of missiles, people in the US and Russia have lived in the constant fear that Washington, Moscow, or their own city could be destroyed in a moment. Knowledge that they are being targeted cannot provide security, only insecurity, to the people of the US and Russia, as well as India and Pakistan.

What then is the security rationale for building nuclear weapons? The usual justification offered is that nuclear weapons are needed to deter the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by another country. Underlying the concept of deterrence is the idea of Mutually Assured Destruction – that any use of nuclear weapons by two countries possessing large nuclear arsenals would lead to massive destruction in both countries.<sup>1</sup> The idea of deterrence is that faced with this prospect of destruction, no country would initiate war. This notion of nuclear deterrence, by being articulated often enough, seems to

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1. Mutually Assured Destruction, like much of the language that is used in discussing nuclear weapons, camouflages what is being talked about. Even official policy-makers occasionally admit this. For example, Fred C.

have become accepted as true. Deterrence, however, is not a law of nature like the theory of relativity. Underlying it are various assumptions, any of which may turn out to be false at any given point in time. And, the result of any failure could be catastrophic.

**T**he most basic assumption is that states are unitary, rational decision-makers trying to maximize their expected utility.<sup>2</sup> In reality, of course, this is far from true. Nevertheless, international relations scholars often assume this because it makes it easier to make predictions. Both the assumptions of unitary actors and rationality become particularly problematic during periods of crisis, especially war. Then, the multiplicity of individuals, institutions and interests that shape decision making become crucial and could lead to outcomes that would be termed irrational.<sup>3</sup>

Irrational behaviour could also manifest itself at the individual level. An example of this was Richard Nixon who, under the strains of his final days in the presidency, is said to have sobbed, beaten his fists on the floor of his office, and to have mused about his ability to release the forces of nuclear disaster. The (then) Defense Secretary, Schlesinger, took special precautions to prevent any of

his orders to nuclear forces from being carried out.<sup>4</sup> Had there been an international crisis during that period, there is no way of knowing how Nixon would have acted. The use of nuclear weapons by Nixon, or by any other leader at any other time, would have meant the death of deterrence – and millions of people.

The counterparts of Nixon in South Asia could be Vajpayee or George Fernandes or Mulayam Singh Yadav or Nawaz Sharif or Gohar Ayub Khan. The question to think about is if anyone would, or should, feel secure with the knowledge that these people have the lives of millions of people in South Asia at their mercy. Nuclear war could result from a wrong judgement either on their part or by genuine mistakes.

**D**espite these unwarranted assumptions as the main piece of evidence for trusting their arguments, believers in nuclear deterrence offer us the fact that the US and the Soviet Union did not go to (major) war against each other during the Cold War. Political scientists and historians have long contested the suggested explanation that it was nuclear weapons which kept the peace. Many, even believers in deterrence, would point to a range of factors that aided stability: the legacy of World War II, bipolarity, economic independence rather than interdependence, and so on.<sup>5</sup> It has even been argued that 'while nuclear weapons may have substantially influenced political rhetoric, public discourse, and defence

budgets and planning, it is not at all clear that they have had a significant impact on the history of world affairs since World War II.'<sup>6</sup> Thus, evidence for deterrence is weak, at best. Further, the absence of war so far does not imply that the same would hold true during other circumstances and for all time.

**O**ver and above these arguments for why deterrence may not be based on well-founded assumptions, it is worth noting that a growing number of military officials with concrete experience of working with nuclear weapons have questioned the logic of deterrence. Commander Robert Green, a retired British naval officer, calls nuclear deterrence 'a dangerous illusion.'<sup>7</sup> According to General Lee Butler, who headed the US Strategic Air Command, the world 'survived the Cuban missile crisis no thanks to deterrence, but only by the grace of God.'<sup>8</sup>

Thus, to reiterate, deterrence is based on faulty assumptions and may break down, especially in crises. For example, a single rash act, or even rumours of a planned attack by the adversary, may trigger off nuclear war. If that happens, the massive destructive power available to both sides, intended precisely to strengthen deterrence, would ensure large-scale death and destruction.

For the present, let us grant the votaries of deterrence their security blankets and see what else needs to be

Ikle, who went on to be the US Undersecretary of Defense during the Reagan administration, says, 'Assured Destruction fails to indicate what is to be destroyed; but then "assured genocide" would reveal the truth too starkly. Keeping ready arsenals for instant and unrestrained slaughter of men, women and children is likely to impose a wrenching perspective on the officialdom of both nations.' See, Fred. C. Ikle, 'Can Nuclear Deterrence Last Out the Century', *Foreign Affairs* 51, 1973.

2. Honore M. Catudal, *Nuclear Deterrence: Does it Deter?* Mansell Publishing, London, 1985, p. 56.

3. Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*. Sage, Beverly Hills, 1977, pp. 101-102.

4. Bruce Russett, *The Prisoners of Insecurity: Nuclear Deterrence, the Arms Race, and Arms Control*. W.H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1983, p. 121.

5. John Lewis Gaddis, 'The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System', *International Security* 10(4), Spring 1986.

6. John Muller, 'The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World', *International Security* 13(2), Fall 1988.

7. Commander Robert Green, 'Why Nuclear Deterrence is a Dangerous Illusion', *Agni: Studies in International Strategic Issues* 2(3), January-May 1997.

8. General George Lee Butler, 'Time to End the Age of Nukes', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March/April 1997, pp. 33-36.

in place for nuclear arsenals to even pretend to offer security.

Having a large nuclear arsenal alone does not seem to be sufficient for deterrence. The US and Russia live in perpetual fear that the other may launch a first strike and hence have put into place early warning systems. Multiple satellites monitor the whole world looking for signals of missile launches. Once detected, there are early warning radars that would take over, follow missile trajectories, and pass on the data to processing centres. From thereon, there are communication systems that attempt to ensure that information is conveyed to decision-makers that are more senior.

**T**hese satellites and early warning radar systems give them information within one and a half minutes of the possible launch of a missile. The analysis of this data takes about two and a half minutes. During the next few minutes, decision-makers could discuss the likelihood of the attack being real. If no other explanations could be found for the signals, the President would be notified and he could call the other side to check if there had been an accidental launch of the missiles. All this is possible because missiles take about 25 minutes to travel from one country to the other. Further, this also allows various fail-safe measures to be built into the system as a hedge against miscalculation. The system, thus, provides for many layers of evaluation of accuracy of signals and decision-making.

Despite the enormous financial and technical resources invested in setting up and running these early warning systems and trying to make them fool-proof, these systems frequently failed. Information on these failures is largely kept secret. It is known, however, that between 1977 and 1984 the US early warning system

showed over 20,000 false alarms of a missile attack. Over 1000 of these were considered serious enough for bombers and missiles to be placed on alert.<sup>9</sup>

**T**here were similar scares on the Russian side as well; a recent example is worth recounting. On 25 January 1995, military technicians at several radar stations across northern Russia thought they had seen a single missile from a US submarine coming towards Russia. This information was passed on through the chains of command to President Yeltsin who activated the 'nuclear briefcase', thus putting Russian forces on high alert. Subsequently, after about eight minutes, senior military officers determined that the rocket was headed far out to sea. The rocket turned out to be an American scientific probe to study the northern lights.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of South Asia, even if such systems could be set up at enormous financial costs that we can scarcely afford, they would just not suffice. Both India and Pakistan are adjoining nations with a long border. Missile and airplane flight times are very short. A Prithvi missile would take three to five minutes to reach almost anywhere in Pakistan. A Ghauri missile would take about five minutes to reach Delhi. Where, then, is the time for analysis of signals from satellites and radars, or to discuss the threat? How can leaders on both sides talk and check if the launch was accidental or intentional?

9. H.L. Abrams, 'Strategic Defense and Inadvertent Nuclear War', in *Inadvertent Nuclear War: The Implications of the Changing Global Order* edited by H. Wiberg, I.D. Petersen and P. Smoker. Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 39-55.

10. Bruce G. Blair, Harold A. Feiveson and Frank von Hippel, 'Taking Nuclear Weapons off Hair-Trigger Alert', *Scientific American*, November 1997.

Because of this short warning time, both nations are likely to adopt a policy of launching their missiles as soon as there is a likelihood of the adversary launching an attack, or risk the prospect of losing their missiles on the ground. In light of the multiple possibilities for false alarms, this policy would almost ensure that nuclear weapons are used, eventually. If missiles like Prithvi and Ghauri are loaded with nuclear warheads and deployed on hair-trigger alert, the people of India and Pakistan are doomed to living in constant insecurity.

**E**ven if one were to believe in deterrence, nuclear weapons pose conflicting demands. On the one hand, they have to be dispersed and in the hands of the military so that they can be used as soon as there is warning of an attack by the adversary. On the other hand, the decision to use these weapons is so momentous that one would like only the highest levels to authorize their use, that too after due deliberation. A third dimension is added by the widespread, large-scale effects of nuclear war – these could disrupt communication systems that allow leaders or commanders to communicate with field personnel.

Command and control systems are systems put in place to minimize the chances of inadvertent or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. This is an arrangement of facilities, personnel, procedures and means of information acquisition, processing, and dissemination used by a commander in planning, directing, and controlling military operations.<sup>11</sup>

Most discussions of command and control emphasize the technical measures, implying in the process that if the technology is available then one

11. Paul Bracken, *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983, p. 3.

can feel secure. However, even the most sophisticated technical devices could be rendered worthless if improperly implemented.<sup>12</sup> For instance, one popular device to block unauthorized detonations is called Permissive Action Links (PALs). It is possible to imagine a PAL-code arrangement in which, due to concern about possible breakdown of communication with the field commander, higher authorities allow local access of the code. In such a case, regardless of how sophisticated the PAL hardware may be, unauthorized launch is possible.

**E**ven the most advanced command and control systems are not foolproof. One only has to see Hollywood movies, starting with the classic *Dr. Strangelove*, to visualize possible scenarios under which unauthorized attacks could take place. Here, as in other realms, truth could indeed be stranger than fiction.

Given the novelty of the situation, despite assurances by the prime ministers of India and Pakistan, it is highly unlikely that any foolproof command and control system would have been worked out. Indeed, Prime Minister Vajpayee said that India does not intend to replicate the kind of command and control structures possessed by other nuclear weapon states.<sup>13</sup> Thus, at the current moment, once weapons are assembled and handed over to the military, there is always a constant fear that some military official, for whatever reasons, may decide to launch an attack against the 'enemy'. The way to avoid such issues is simply not to assemble nuclear weapons. Some advocates of nuclear deterrence

in India even recommend keeping nuclear weapons dismantled and their components stored separately.<sup>14</sup>

**S**etting up these early warning systems and command and control mechanisms do not preclude the possibilities of accidents involving nuclear weapons. Despite safety and security measures, such accidents continue to occur around the world. Between 1950 and 1990, just the United States had over 175 accidents involving either nuclear weapons or vehicles that are suspected to have been carrying nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup>

The greatest danger, which has fortunately never happened, would come from the accidental full-scale detonation of a nuclear weapon. However, there have been numerous accidents in which the chemical explosive surrounding the radioactive core of a nuclear weapon has exploded. For example, on 17 January 1966, a B-52 bomber and a KC-135 refueling tanker collided in mid-air near Palomares, Spain. The B-52 crashed and four hydrogen bombs (15-25 megatons) were separated from the plane. The chemical explosives in two of the bombs exploded leading to release of radioactive material in the middle of a populated area. A similar accident near any of the densely populated South Asian cities could make Bhopal look pale in comparison.<sup>16</sup>

If the number of accidents involving nuclear weapons seems high, the number of accidents (or incidents, as they are referred to by officials) in

nuclear reactors would be even more. Many, of course, are in reactors used primarily to produce energy. Most of them do not lead to any large-scale consequences. The main people at risk are the workers in these facilities. But, as the Chernobyl accident showed, when nuclear reactors have a major accident, then huge regions are at risk. For example, even in Connecticut, USA, there was a 26% increase in thyroid cancers due to radiation from Chernobyl.<sup>17</sup> While the Chernobyl reactor was primarily intended for the production of nuclear energy, even accidents at reactors that produce plutonium for nuclear weapons, which are typically smaller and somewhat different in the details of construction and operation, would lead to qualitatively similar consequences.

**E**ven under normal conditions facilities involved in manufacturing nuclear weapons – which include uranium mines, fuel element manufacturing plants, nuclear reactors, reprocessing centres and spent fuel storage sites<sup>18</sup> – cause radiation related diseases to people living in their vicinity.<sup>19</sup> Further, nuclear weapons, as we have seen recently, have to be tested.

Frank von Hippel, 'The Hazard from Plutonium Dispersal by Nuclear-warhead Accidents', *Science and Global Security* 2, 1990, pp. 21-42.

17. Permanent People's Tribunal, Chernobyl: Environmental, Health and Human Rights Implications. International Peace Bureau, Geneva, 1996, p. 133.

18. One of the largest nuclear disasters before the Chernobyl accident was the explosion of a storage tank containing high-level nuclear waste at the Chelyabinsk-65 nuclear weapons complex. The story of this disaster and the efforts to suppress knowledge of this may be found in Z.A. Medvedev, *Nuclear Disaster in the Urals*. Vintage Books, New York, 1980.

19. *Nuclear Wastelands: A Global Guide to Nuclear Weapons Production and its Health and Environmental Effects* edited by Arjun Makhijani, Howard Hu and Katherine Yih, for a Special Commission of International Phy-

12. Peter D. Feaver, 'Command and Control in Emerging Nuclear Nations', *International Security* 17(3), Winter 1992/93.

13. Kenneth J. Cooper, 'Leader says India has a "Credible" Deterrent', *Washington Post*, 17 June 1998.

14. General K. Sundarji, 'Imperatives of Indian Minimum Deterrence', *Agni: Studies in International Strategic Issues* 2(1), May 1996.

15. Shaun Gregory, *The Hidden Costs of Deterrence: Nuclear Weapons Accidents*. Brassey's, London, 1990.

16. It has been estimated that dispersal of kilogram quantities of plutonium (used in nuclear weapons) could cause a few thousand deaths due to cancer. See Steve Fetter and

It is estimated that nuclear testing the world over would lead to over 430,000 cancer fatalities.<sup>20</sup> So far, these victims of nuclear weapons manufacture and testing have been the main casualties of nuclear weapons since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Except under the narrowest definitions of security, the nuclear weapons complex would certainly count as a source of insecurity, especially to communities living near any of these facilities.

**N**uclear weapons also pose non-nuclear threats. For nearly the whole period of the 'long peace', the US and the Soviet Union were engaged in a series of proxy wars of which Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan are just the most prominent examples. Nuclear weapons, by seemingly protecting their homelands, allowed these wars to be fought.<sup>21</sup> It is no wonder then that violence and militarism in Kashmir became intensified around the period when Pakistan started claiming and feeling confident about its nuclear capability in the late 1980s.

Despite claims that the establishment of nuclear capability in South Asia would freeze the Kashmir conflict, recent acts of terrorism in the Valley have demonstrated that nuclear tests have not changed the situation. The security of the people of Kashmir, as well as people living in other arenas of covert warfare between India and Pakistan, are certainly not enhanced by the bomb-making capabilities of the two countries. Fur-

ther, there is also the risk that even a small battle could escalate into nuclear war.

**I**n summing up, we see that nuclear weapons lead to different kinds of insecurity. Some like those from proxy wars or from accidents in facilities involved in producing nuclear weapon components do not even involve nuclear weapons in any way. But the great danger comes from the possibility of a nuclear explosion, by mistake or otherwise.

It is worth emphasizing what this could lead to. If a small nuclear weapon with the same yield (15 kilotons) as the one that was dropped on Hiroshima more than 50 years ago were exploded over Mumbai or Karachi, the number of immediate deaths could be as high as half a million.<sup>22</sup> This does not include the deaths that would arise from cancers and other diseases that result from the long-term effects of radiation. Further, in case of such an attack, it is not just those who are in Mumbai or Karachi at the time of the explosion who are affected. Radioactive fallout could spread across large regions due to wind and radiation levels will remain high for a long period. Thus, the range of the destruction extends across space and time. India and Pakistan now have to come to terms with Robert Jay Lifton's statement: 'The central existential fact of the nuclear age is vulnerability.'<sup>23</sup>

The way out of this predicament is to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons – both locally and globally.

sicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and The Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, The MIT Press, Cambridge, USA, 1995.

20. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and Institute of Energy and Environmental Research, *Radioactive Heaven and Earth*. Zed Books, London, 1991.

21. See, for example, Gar Alperovitz and Kai Bird. 'The Centrality of the Bomb', *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1994, pp. 3-20.

22. M.V. Ramana. 'Bombing Bombay? Effects of Nuclear Weapons and a Case Study of a Hypothetical Explosion'. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War Report (forthcoming).

23. Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case Against Nuclearism*. Basic Books, USA, 1982.



# Distortion of scientific tradition

AMULYA K.N. REDDY

THE nuclear tests of 11 and 13 May created major turbulence in India, the sub-continent and the world. In the process, strange events were observed. For instance, a phalanx of directors of CSIR laboratories gave a standing ovation to the minister of science when he announced India's successful nuclear tests. The prime minister added *jai vigyan* to the *jai jawan* slogan so that scientists could join soldiers in the march to battle. Even more telling was a photograph of India's leading nuclear scientists in military camouflage uniforms at Pokhran. Indian science was foregrounded as a major determinant of the present and future. Suddenly, the external linkages of Indian science and its internal condition have become central issues for scrutiny and assessment.

This issue of *Seminar* is an excellent occasion for such a discussion. In this paper the focus will be on the way the nuclear tests have exposed the relationship between Indian science, on the one hand, and Indian society, its state, humanistic tradition, morality and scientific community on the other.

Such an analysis is overdue because an excellent opportunity for a critical assessment of Indian science was missed in 1997. Last year's celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Indian independence provoked a large number of articles in various newspapers, magazines and journals on politics, economics, industry, agriculture, infrastructure and so on. Many of the discussions were scholarly, insightful,

enlightening and of archival value. In striking contrast were the articles on science in independent India, which ended up as pedestrian diaries of the growth of post-1947 Indian science. They were lavish in their praise of its 'achievements' but almost completely lacking in criticism and analysis. There was, for instance, no attempt at a SWOT or strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats analysis. There was no discussion of the external linkages of Indian science to our state and to society. There was also no treatment of the internal health and functioning of scientific organisations and of the scientific community. And after the anniversary, non introspective normalcy and self-satisfied smugness soon returned.

Discussions on Indian science must start with the country's poverty, for this is its defining characteristic and fundamental reality. In 1951, India's poor numbered 164 million; in 1993-94, the number had increased to 312 million, that is, double the number of people who could not meet their daily subsistence requirements at independence. Between 1950-51 and 1993-94, the population below the poverty line declined by less than one per cent per year. One in three Indians go to bed hungry. Life expectancy is about 60. Half the Indian population cannot read or write. The Human Poverty Index (HPI) is about 37% — this index is a composite of *longevity* (19.4% of the population expected to die before the age of 40), *knowledge* (48.8% are illiterate), and *standard of*

living (19% are without access to safe drinking water, 15% without access to health services and 53% of the children are malnourished/underweight). India belongs well and truly to the club of poorest nations. The country can move out of this cursed club only through sustainable development.

It is this Indian reality that must guide the direction of Indian science. Instead, what is observed is a lack of correspondence between the thrust of Indian science and the problems of the Indian people. According to the expenditures on R&D, it appears that the bulk of the expenditure (about two-thirds<sup>1</sup>) goes to the Defence Research and Development Organisation, Department of Space and Department of Atomic Energy, all of which have overt and/or covert military implications. Of the balance, a large percentage goes to industrial research, but this caters largely to the needs of the elite. In fact, going by the militarist-elitist expenditure pattern of Indian R&D, one would think that the primary problems of Indian society concern external security and upper class consumption wants, rather than poor health, illiteracy and basic needs.

**T**his mis-orientation of Indian science is not a surprise. It follows from the fact that the country consists of small islands of urban splendour amidst vast oceans of rural misery. This situation is often referred to as a 'dual society' – a small politically powerful elite (constituting a mere 10-15% of the population and consisting

of industrialists, landlords, bureaucrats, professionals and white-collar labour) living in conspicuous affluence amidst the abject poverty of the politically weak masses.

**F**ree India started with the Nehruvian idea of science as an essential accoutrement of a modern society. Today, the nuclear tests have shown the determination of the rulers to make Indian science a servant of the state and its internal and external political ambitions. The jai vigyan pronouncement symbolises this attempt by the government to co-opt scientists, subverting the idea that science is the people's *astra* (weapon) against poverty.

But, this government's move is not an unrequited one-sided desire to embrace. In turn, scientists have been wooing the ruling establishment with a desperate desire to be in the corridors of power. When the government kept them at an arm's length – as seems to have been the case in the Narasimha Rao regime – scientists felt embittered and rejected. They even considered that period as the nadir of post Independence Indian science.

In contrast, the giants of Indian science, in particular C. V. Raman and Meghnad Saha, considered their independence from government in the years immediately after 1947 to be a matter of pride. But, power was irresistible to the lesser scientists who followed. And the only way this desire could be fulfilled was to woo the government through its scientific ministries and their secretaries. Scientific academies courted secretaries of scientific ministries to be their presidents and office-bearers. There was no regret that, in the process, the academies lost their independence. Or, that their voices could not be distinguished from those of the government. This in a country where there are few other institutions that are independent enough

to come up with perspectives different from the government. In the West, the universities provide independent policy studies, but such independence is rare in India.

Thus, scientists wanted to be, and became, a pressure group. All this has become clear after the tests when a former prime minister revealed how the nuclear scientists lobbied the government to give them a chance to prove their capability. The scientists had not done a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the tests and their fall-out. They did not reveal a national perspective. If anything, they pursued a narrow departmental, if not personal, agenda, perhaps emulating their political masters.

**A**re the tests a great achievement of Indian science? Yes, only if one has an inferiority complex and has doubts about whether Indian scientists are as good as their western counterparts. There is no need for such inferiority. It was always known that, given a clear mission and the necessary resources, Indian science can reach the highest levels of achievement. Any residual doubts can be set at rest by noting that the best universities, institutes and industries of the US are filled with scientists of Indian origin. Indians are as good as the best. The tests have only confirmed this truth. There was no need for euphoria after the tests.

Of course, it is difficult under Indian conditions to deliver a product as distinct from an idea or concept. This has been done. To that extent, the tests are an achievement. Also, it is widely believed that Indians have serious problems in working together. The bomb squad has worked as a team. This is another achievement. But, we must take into account the large number (thousands) of scientists in DAE, the enormous amount of money spent over the years (thousands of

1. The Union Budget, Expenditure Budget, Volume II gives 59% for Defence R&D, DAE and DOS, and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute website <http://www.sipri.se> has an article 'Nuclear deterrence, nuclear tests and science in South Asia: selected statistics and quotes' compiled by Eric Arnett which states that the 'percentage of government funding for science spent on military, nuclear and space R&D' was 68% in FY 1996-97.'

crores) and the decades of time (20 years for Pokhran I and 24 years for Pokhran II).

Further, a great deal of information is available on the Web and in the public domain. Even the Teller-Ulam configuration of the hydrogen bomb has been described. In any case, we must not forget that the fission bomb is a 53 year old technology, and the fusion bomb is a 46 year old technology. So, we have replicated half a century old achievements. And, as Pakistan has demonstrated, 'What one Abdul (Kalam) can do, another Abdul (Quader Khan) can!'

Indian science cannot escape the fact that it is operating in the land of Gandhi. He said: 'Recall the face of the poorest and most helpless person whom you have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything by it? Will it restore him to control over his life and destiny?' Quite clearly, this Gandhi talisman was ignored in the entire process of preparing for and carrying out the nuclear tests. If the heritage of Gandhi was denied by Indian science, an even greater sacrilege was committed by using the code: 'The Buddha has smiled!' to convey to Indira Gandhi the message that Pokhran I had been a success. This sully of the memory of Buddha was compounded by choosing Buddha Jayanti to set off the recent explosions.

The roots of this disjunction between Indian science and morality go much deeper. Modern science has been based on two dichotomies: (a) separation of the subject from the object and (b) separation of feelings and emotion (the non-cognitive self) from thought and analysis (the cognitive self). Accordingly, a scientist's first duty is to separate himself/herself from the object under study, and the

second duty is to eschew feelings from the analysis. Thereby, science claims objectivity. However, the first dichotomy leads inevitably to degradation of the objects of study (even humans) into things, and the second, to the removal of feelings for objects (plants, animals and finally human beings of different castes, tribes, nationalities and religions).

All this leads to the conventional view that science is amoral and neutral. We must not forget that Oppenheimer said that the first atomic bomb was 'technically sweet'. Or that, at the 1988 Bangalore national workshop on 'nuclear plants with specific reference to Kaiga', a Department of Atomic Energy scientist said: 'Hiroshima provided us with a fortunate opportunity to study radiation effects!' The claim of amorality is a clever way of escaping responsibility for the horrors that have sprung from science, for instance, for the Hiroshima bomb after computing and prescribing the height at which the bomb must be exploded to maximise the number of people who would die.

This neutrality of science is also implicit in Kalam's repeated statement that 'he is only an engineer' and that 'his missile can also be used for delivering flowers.' But, the youth of the 1960s in Europe and North America rejected such sophistry. As did the post-World War II judgements at Nuremberg which ruled that the Nazis charged with war crimes (like all human beings, even soldiers) cannot claim immunity on the grounds that they carried out orders; they have to bear full responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

The relationship between the subject (the scientist) and the system under scientific study (the object) must be dialectical so that initial separation (and distance) ends in subse-

quent unification (and embrace). The suppression of emotion *during* analysis must give way to emotion *after* analysis. The functioning of scientists as individuals, groups and institutions must be constrained and limited by moral strictures and bans. Otherwise, the synergy between the isolation of the subject from the object and the removal or absence of emotions and feelings leads inevitably to science becoming the instrument of violence, oppression and evil. Science, therefore, is not neutral and amoral. It can and must be encoded with *life affirming* values.

From this standpoint, there are no life-affirming values associated with the nuclear tests and the attitude of the government to weaponisation. In fact, if there are any values at all, they are life-destroying. And the prime minister's jai vigyan pronouncement is tantamount to eulogising activities of science that can end up killing millions of non-combatants – children, women and men – in a nuclear attack. There is a pernicious value system underlying all this jai vigyan stuff which is only a ploy of the rulers to win over scientists to the militarization of Indian science. By going euphoric over science as an instrument of mega-death, the government is sending a message commending the nexus between science and evil. The link between science and morality must be re-established.

The nuclear tests also exposed the internal condition of Indian science. Faced with a complexity of issues raised by the tests – issues of (internal and external) security, trade and economics, politics, ethics, national traditions – it would have been natural for our body of intelligent and creative scientists to develop a spectrum of views. Instead, the virtually unanimous euphoria was astonishing. And,

the silence of the present and past leaders of science its journals and its academies – was deafening. Since it is statistically unlikely that almost the entire body of scientists had independently arrived at a single view, one has to probe deeper to find an explanation.

The vitality of science in a society depends upon the challenges thrown up by the innovation chain leading to technology as well as upon its internal momentum arising from the backlog of unresolved problems. An understanding of science-society interactions in India has to take into account, on the one hand, the existence of a dual society and, on the other, its strong interaction with the industrialised countries. The coupling with the industrialised countries leads to the dominance of foreign collaborating industry based on the import of western technology, and the dual character of Indian society results in an overwhelmingly elitist thrust of indigenous technology. Further, even these indigenous technological efforts consist almost wholly of the imitation and adaptation of western technology, rather than of innovation.

**T**his near complete decoupling of science and technology from each other has a profound impact on science in India and produces its first major abnormality. Because of the preponderance of technology imports and of the imitative character of indigenous technology, the initial part of the innovation chain (consisting of research, design and development, and engineering for manufacturing) hardly exists in the country. As a result, its scientific system is not subject to the pressure of basic problems emerging from technology. And, without this pressure from technology, indigenous science is deprived of a powerful driving force. If Indian

science is to flourish, it must depend solely upon its internal momentum which is the product of the 'mass' of scientists and the 'velocity' or pace of scientific research.

**T**he pace or tempo of research activity depends upon the existence and maintenance of an atmosphere of excitement which in turn requires a conviction of being 'hot on the trail' of important discoveries. Such an atmosphere is facilitated by rapid communication between scientists through personal contacts, seminars, symposia and conferences and through well-referred journals which ensure quick publication. The pace of research is usually set by outstanding scientists who attract a following. The point is that scientists tend 'to hunt in packs' behind leaders.

The mass of scientists depends upon the size of the scientific body, but not merely upon the number of scientists. What is required is a *community* of *interacting* scientists with the well-established traditions of a peer system. Scientific peers are crucial for discussions, brain-storming and testing out ideas, for acquiring different ways of looking at a problem, for enhancing the quality of seminars, symposia and conferences, for rigorous assessment and constructive criticism of work, for help in improving its quality, for weeding out defective work, for a process of recognition that is appreciated, and so on. In short, without the environment of an actively interacting scientific community, there cannot be the natural selection of scientific ideas and data which alone will ensure that the fittest theories and experiments survive.

Natural selection of ideas implies competition and diversity. It cannot arise if there is a monoculture of views. Truth cannot emerge if there is an absence and/or exclusion of dis-

sent,<sup>2</sup> and certainly not if dissenters are branded anti-scientific and anti-national. It is against this background that one notes that there are no major scientific controversies within the Indian scientific establishment. Bitter enmities between some leaders of Indian science are well known, but they are only due to conflicts of ambitions and careers; they are not on scientific issues. The only controversies that have arisen – the Bhopal gas leak, the Sardar Sarovar project, nuclear power – have arisen from scientists who are outside the establishment or are treated as renegades and ignored.

**T**he standard way of avoiding genuine controversy and peer review is to exclude unorthodox views from seminars, committees, journals and other forums (including the peer-reviewing process). So, one finds internationally acclaimed experts not being invited to meetings on their subject because they hold 'unacceptable' views or they are not part of the hierarchy. The dialectic of truth is frustrated even in so-called institutes of 'advanced' studies. Of course, this distortion of scientific tradition cannot survive with transparent and democratic functioning. That is why there is a striking lack of transparency, undemocratic functioning and manipulation of peer review.

Underlying all this violation of the scientific tradition and its codes of behaviour is the fact that 'he who pays the piper calls the tune.' Government and quasi-government sources are responsible for the overwhelming

2. Appreciation of the importance of dissent can be found in most unexpected quarters. *The Hindu* of 5 July 1998 (p. 7) carries a report that the CIA has an officer in charge of 'contrarian thinking' whose failure 'to challenge the experts of the agency and other intelligence agencies' was the 'key incident' contributing to the 'worst intelligence failure' in recent times of the US not predicting the Indian nuclear tests.

share of science funding so that scientific activity depends strongly on this funding, and almost all scientists are on the government pay-roll or perk-roll. There are also a number of cash prizes and awards which act as further inducements to conform, rather than dissent. No wonder there was a stampede of scientists to applaud the nuclear tests and prove their patriotism as perceived by the establishment. Fortunately, despite this pressure for conformity, there were scientists who dissented and their numbers have grown with the waning of the euphoria.

**T**he nuclear tests and threat of weaponisation have exposed serious weaknesses in Indian science. They have shown that Indian science is responding more to the militaristic and consumption ambitions of the elite than to the problems of the poverty-stricken Indian masses. Rather than be a force that balances the demands of the state and civil society, the tests have revealed that Indian science has become a servant of the state whilst pressuring it to advance the vested interests of Indian science and its scientists. The tests have revealed that the science-state nexus is strong.

Indian science has betrayed the humanistic heritage left behind by Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Buddha. Sheltering behind the argument that science is amoral and neutral, Indian science may become an instrument of violence, oppression and evil. It has not encoded itself with life-affirming values. Immediately after the nuclear tests, the majority of Indian scientists echoed the official line in a regimented fashion. They did not show the independence of perspective and diversity of views characteristic of a community of interacting scientists with the well-established traditions of science.

Is there hope for Indian science? Yes, and it is to be found in the movements of dissent that emerged from many scientific institutions after the nuclear tests.<sup>3</sup> If these 'nuclei' grow and coalesce, then there is hope for a 'phase transformation' through which the character of Indian science will change. Then, the poor and the meek shall inherit Indian science. The state will be enriched by having a significant fraction of scientists reflecting independent views through the institutions of civil society. The morality of Indian science will become a tribute to the legacy of Gandhi and Buddha.

Now that the tests are over, Indian scientists must move forward. They must stop (a) the jingoistic exploitation of the event by forces with short-term political interests, (b) the erosion of democracy, (c) the further diversion of scientific talent away from the problems of the poor towards military applications of science and (d) an arms race with our neighbours. They must contribute to the process of international disarmament. And above all, they must turn their attention to the historic mission of giving all Indians – particularly the underprivileged – a better life at least in the next century.

**T**hey have several roles as intelligent people privileged with technical training:

1. They must spread awareness of the enormous consequences of the path the government may choose from the nuclear option to tested weapons to deployed weapons to weapons on hair-trigger alert. For example, the effects of one primitive Hiroshima-type bomb on Bangalore or Chennai or Calcutta or Delhi or Mumbai must

3. See the website <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/2959> of *Indian Scientists on the Nuclear Tests*.

be estimated and publicised. Independent calculations must be made of the financial costs of the ruinous path the country is being urged to choose.

2. They must build an independent peer group outside the establishment to verify the claims being made. Secrecy stifles independence, erodes excellence and breeds mistakes (and even lies!). For example, independent estimates of the costs of nuclear power have already revealed serious flaws in DAE's costing. No wonder that secrecy is an important weapon used by insecure establishments to prevent rigorous peer review.

3. They must reorient the thrust of Indian S&T. Unfortunately, this demand leads to the spotlight being turned on fundamental research which is asked to justify its usefulness. But, fundamental research accounts for less than 10-15% of the total expenditure. This share should be given – no questions asked – to the fundamental scientists. In return, all that must be insisted upon is that they set up and implement rigorous quality control measures and strive for excellence. The real accused is applied research and technology which consumes the bulk of the R&D funds. It must be carefully ensured that its thrust corresponds to the country's problems.<sup>4</sup> In the process it must not be forgotten that India is a dual society with a powerful elite and disempowered masses.

4. Scientists must be involved in new coalitions of people against the militaristic turn in the affairs of the nation. They must join forces with peace activists, development workers, environmentalists, women, dalits – in fact, all those who are concerned about the future

4. That this is possible even under present conditions was proved by several governmental and autonomous institutions as well as non-governmental organisations in the late 1970s and the 1980s which evolved innovative efforts and methodologies to re-unite science and the people.

# Indian science after Pokhran II

T. JAYARAMAN

THE political stock of Indian science and technology today appears to have reached an all-time high. Following Pokhran II, praise has been showered on Indian scientists and engineers by the nation's political leadership, the media and the public at large.

It would seem that even if India has not succeeded in bombing its way into the nuclear weapons club, Indian science and technology has certainly bombed its way into public favour. Even as parliamentary criticism has mounted against the motivation, wisdom and timing of the BJP-led government's decision to test, little criticism has been directed at the atomic energy and defence research establishments. The claims of high scientific achievement have been accepted without notable challenge, nor has there been any significant criticism of their political role in the abrupt and

adventurist reversal of India's established nuclear policy line.

In fact, it has been an integral part of the government's strategy to use the scientific argument, and the general public appreciation of Indian science and its successes, to justify its reactionary departure from India's established nuclear policy. Initiating the parliamentary debate on the nuclear issue, Prime Minister Vajpayee claimed that India's newly acquired nuclear weapons state status was 'an endowment given to her by scientists and engineers.'

The new upbeat attitude to Indian science and technology seems also to be a significant contributory factor to sustaining the conviction that economic sanctions could be weathered without much damage. Even the private sector, long known to have contributed virtually nothing to S&T research in

India and to prefer foreign collaborations to developing their own technological capabilities, has expressed support for indigenous capabilities in terms that have hardly been heard before.

This chorus of support for Indian S&T, and the apparent self-confidence projected by the atomic energy and defence research establishments following the nuclear tests, has created genuine confusion among sections of public opinion that would otherwise have reacted more sharply to the sudden reversal of the earlier nuclear policy. It is important therefore to examine, in some detail, what Pokhran II reveals about the state of Indian science and technology.

It is argued in what follows that contrary to the popular perception, Pokhran II has exposed serious weaknesses in the fabric of Indian science and technology. The political attitudes of the atomic energy and defence research community after Pokhran II betray a backward understanding of science and its role in society. The attempt of the leadership in these sectors to encourage and glorify the programme of nuclear weaponisation constitutes a challenge to the accepted political paradigm of Indian S&T that views science and technology as an integral tool in the task of development. Today, there is the genuine possibility of an unacceptable militarisation of sectors of Indian science and a serious distortion of the priorities that science and technology must necessarily have in a developing society.

If we cut through the official and media hype and go beyond the boastful claims of the atomic energy and defence research establishments, it is clear that the nuclear weapons tests have presented, unarguably, the most meaningful political and moral chal-

lenge to Indian science and technology in the post-independence period. It is a challenge to which the Indian scientific and technological community as a whole has been unable to respond in any serious fashion, exposing serious weaknesses in their development as a profession, in the broad sense of the term.

At the level of scientific credibility itself, the validity of two significant scientific claims made with regard to the nuclear weapons tests of May 1998 have not yet been adequately established. The first important claim is that one of the weapons tested on 11 May was actually a thermo-nuclear device; the second is that our nuclear weapons specialists have now the capability to undertake sub-critical testing.

The major suspicions about whether India actually has a thermo-nuclear weapon, voiced mainly in the foreign media, centre essentially around the low explosive power of the devices. In general, the data appears consistent, according to foreign experts (for an early example, see *The New York Times* article by William J. Broad, reproduced in *Frontline*, 19 June 1998) with a 'boosted' fission device. However, the DAE has chosen to aggressively counter the doubts with an explicit claim that it was indeed a genuine hydrogen bomb with two explosive stages, a 'secondary fusion device' with a 'fission trigger'. While it is possible that Indian scientists have leap-frogged directly from atomic weapons to low-yield thermo-nuclear devices, bypassing the intermediate stages of 'boosted' fission devices and megaton thermo-nuclear bombs, the situation has not been adequately clarified.

Conflicting signals have emerged from the scientific and political establishments after the first few days.

Peculiarly enough, while the DAE has been forceful in claiming a thermo-nuclear explosion, it has not really pressed a claim that it has, in fact, tested an advanced third-generation device. Strangest of all, the prime minister's *suo moto* statement of 27 May to Parliament is completely silent on the subject of a thermo-nuclear device having been developed. The paper submitted by him to Parliament on 'Evolution of India's nuclear policy' makes only a passing mention of the thermo-nuclear test, while acknowledging other scientific advances like the development of the capability of sub-critical testing.

The second claim, relating to the development of sub-critical testing capabilities, has also been challenged by a special correspondent in an important, technically detailed article in the 17 July 1998 issue of *Frontline*. The basic point is that five tests appear insufficient to justify the claim that henceforth sub-critical tests and computer simulations alone will be sufficient. This is particularly because the dynamics of the explosion in this range of power are extremely complex and appear to require many more sub-kiloton tests before the ability to successfully use sub-critical tests can be acquired. It is quite possible, the correspondent states, that more 'tests' would be subsequently needed in the pursuit of a weaponisation programme.

Apart from the validity of the specific claims made with regard to the nuclear tests, it is important to objectively assess what the claims of high achievement in these tests amount to in comparison with other technological challenges, both in the nuclear field and other sectors. Here an obvious point has been missed in the media and official hype surrounding Pokhran II. The maintaining of

controlled nuclear reactions under safe conditions, as is done in the several different kinds of reactors under operation in this country, is a far greater challenge than the development of nuclear weapons. A fast breeder reactor (of the kind now operational at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Advanced Research – IGCAR – Kalpakkam) is a far greater technical challenge than a nuclear weapon. One may pick other examples from other technological sectors. Several obvious examples are available from space research where the indigenous development of communication satellites and the work towards the development of a geo-stationary launch vehicle are two outstanding examples.

**N**uclear weapons technology, it must be made clear, is proven technology. The basic principles of its functioning and design are known and it has been established that these principles are correct. Fifty years later, it is a matter of getting the details straight; the problem is essentially one of engineering design. The Pokhran II tests may of course have involved new elements in this field or innovative ways to produce the fissile materials used, but none of these can be used to describe the tests as an 'extraordinary' achievement.

It is clear therefore that the celebration of the 'scientific achievements' of Pokhran II had more to do with jingoism and the feeling that India had broken into the club of nuclear weapons powers rather than any objective evaluation of the degree of scientific advance involved in conducting these tests. It is worth noting that much of nuclear weapons technology is secret in nature, and this contributes something extra to the feeling of triumph that accompanies the acquisition and mastery of such technology. In any case, the exagger-

ated claims of 'achievement' were sharply cut to size following the Chagai nuclear tests by Pakistan.

Turning to the political role of the atomic energy and defence research establishments, it is now increasingly clear that they played a pro-active role in building up pressure to conduct the tests. Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, in his letter of 15 May 1998 addressed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (reproduced in *People's Democracy*, 24 May 1998), states clearly that it was the scientists who requested the tests during his tenure, just as they had done with his predecessor, P.V. Narasimha Rao, in 1995.

In a revealing press interview (published in the *Deccan Herald*, 4 March 1998), on the eve of the BJP coming to power, R. Chidambaram, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, claimed that nuclear tests were a 'necessity'. Even while acknowledging that India's existing nuclear weapons capability itself provided a deterrent effect, he nevertheless argued that tests were necessary in order to provide a database for further research. Stating that theoretical work alone on weapons was not enough and that practical testing was needed, he added, 'If you are weak, people will try to take advantage of it.' It is clear that Chidambaram's insistence on the necessity of actual tests was in fact an advocacy of nuclear weapons.

**W**hile the actual history of the development of India's nuclear option and the steps leading to its being exercised are yet to be traced in detail, it is clear that the atomic energy and defence research establishments had, for some time prior to Pokhran II, actively advocated nuclear weaponisation. This is in itself a matter of serious concern. But it is even more disturbing when we consider the nature,

the intellectual level and quality of the political stances and attitudes that the atomic energy and defence research establishments display on nuclear weapons.

**S**everal leading scientists have, after the tests, rivaled each other in a display of boastfulness and jingoism. Abdul Kalam claimed that the nuclear threat had been vacated while Raja Ramanna claimed that the nuclear tests had provided security to India. Chidambaram himself returned to his vision of a strong India in an interview to *Frontline* (5 June 1998). His reply to the question, 'Should we have nuclear weapons or keep the option open?' is worth quoting in full:

'No comment.... The most important thing is that India must become strong. The greatest advantage of recognised strength is that you don't have to use it....everybody knows you are strong. Only when people see you as a weak country, they pressure you. We are a big country. We must learn to behave like a big country of one billion people. We should constantly remind ourselves of our strength.' This is a remarkable statement, marked both by hawkishness as well as a dangerously simplistic understanding of politics.

Kalam has not lagged behind in similar remarks. At his first press conference post-Pokhran, he broke off a technical exposition to remark on 'how a nuclear-armed India will be free of the fear of foreign invasions which have constantly remoulded the ancient Hindu civilisation' (*The Times of India*, 26 May 1998). He added: 'For 2,500 years India has never invaded anybody. But others have come here, so many others have come.' Whatever the voting preferences of Chidambaram and Kalam in terms of political parties, it is clear that their views on nationalism are



remarkably close to the ultra nationalism of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar.

There is another equally disturbing aspect of the attitude of the atomic energy and defence research leadership. It has displayed a marked enthusiasm for weapons, shorn of the sobriety that characterises statements on nuclear weapons by scientists (including those who are involved in arms control and defence related work) the world over. Chidambaram, in the *Frontline* interview referred to above, says about Pokhran II: 'This was my ambition for many years. This has now been achieved.' Kalam is moved to poetry by the tests. Addressing the gathering at a function to felicitate him (*The Times of India*, 28 June 1998), he claims: 'I heard the earth thundering below our feet and rising ahead of us in terror. It was a beautiful sight. It was a triumph of Indian science and technology.'

It is important to emphasise that what is at issue is not simply language. The enthusiasm displayed in these statements seems more like an attempt to play the role of latter-day Oppenheimers and Tellers. The point is that fifty years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and after all that has happened in the realm of nuclear weapons since then, such statements are simply expressions of an anachronistic and backward attitude to science and society issues. The engineering details of nuclear weapons may be classified material. But the debate over the political, social and moral aspects of nuclear weapons has spawned a vast literature, unclassified and easily accessible, that does not seem to have made any impression on these personalities.

Other sections of senior scientists of the atomic energy and defence research sectors of the Indian scientific community have done no better

in their reactions after the nuclear tests. The most common sentiment, expressed both in public and in off-the-record statements to journalists, is that they are happy that they have been given a chance to prove their competence. This is a naive attitude that entirely misses the point about the social responsibility of science and scientists. Such an attitude speaks not of political innocence but of the lack of any sophistication in understanding the implications of science for society.

It is thus that one needs to examine the question of the distortions that are likely to arise in the priorities of Indian science. The manner of distribution of resources, scarce as they are, between various sectors of S&T in the country is in essence a political choice. Given the political stances of those in Indian science who are in high favour today and the BJP-led government's own attitudes, the outlook for science causes serious concern.

Any move towards full weaponisation would entail the diversion of resources from other sectors to atomic energy and defence research. While the first post-Pokhran budget shows no definite signs of a massive investment for weaponisation, one must nevertheless note that the increase in expenditure in S&T has gone almost exclusively to the atomic energy and space sectors. Other ministries that cater to the requirements of the rest of Indian science have had to be content with very modest increases that will simply cover rising costs. The university sector in S&T research, the hardest hit resource-wise in recent times, has little to look forward to.

But the real damage could well happen over a longer time scale. Chidambaram has spoken of the need in India of a military-industrial complex (sic!): 'The sinews of S&T which spur development are also the founda-

tion on which national security (rests)... India needs to build up an MIC which can ensure security on the one hand and catalyse development on the other.' (quoted by Praful Bidwai in *The Times of India*, 1 July 1998). These are notions that are obviously contestable and need to be firmly opposed.

First, the Indian defence forces have always been heavily dependent on imported technology and equipment. The argument that military requirements need to be satisfied immediately by imports will continue to win over any argument about depending on indigenous technology. Sanctions may force some changes but this attitude will not go away so easily.

Second, there are several peaceful S&T projects which, if taken up, will catalyse technological development far more effectively. Nuclear power reactors, being more complicated systems, require a greater variety and range of technological inputs and will obviously fit this catalyst role much better than nuclear weapons. Even a blue-sky research project like building a particle accelerator could be a better choice compared to weapons. Similar arguments may be made by comparing missile development with the development of capabilities to launch, build and maintain geostationary satellites.

Third, technology development driven by military S&T requirements could hardly be expected to be oriented towards solving the basic problems associated with underdevelopment and the pursuit of sustainable integrated development strategies. Only in the reckoning of Prime Minister Vajpayee (and his friends in the Sangh Parivar), who cynically described India's nuclear weapons as 'India's due, the right of one-sixth of humankind,' who announced from the Pokhran

test site the slogan of *Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan* and who declared 11 May 1998 as National Technology Day, would Chidambaram's strategy for development be welcome.

**C**learly, the original Nehruvian vision of science as an integral tool in the task of development has met its severest challenge so far. Even the sharp critique of this vision that emerged in the days of liberalisation and so-called economic reform did not pose the dangers to indigenous S&T that appear in today's scenario. The Nehruvian vision had its share of naivete in its underplaying of the role of socio-political change as an important aspect of development (land reforms were never as important as the Green Revolution). But it had two, not inconsiderable, merits. The first was in having a humane and peaceful worldview as its fundamental premise and the second was its strong link to secular and rational thought. Within this paradigm, from the viewpoint of democratic and progressive public opinion, the investment in advanced science and technology was an investment for the future, an attempt to keep up with the knowledge explosion of the twentieth century, even as the basic tasks of development were attended to.

The new paradigm being foisted is one that rejects both the fundamental premise of peace and humaneness and encourages links with irrational jingoism and an anti-secular outlook. Advanced science and technology in India is sought to be associated with military might and the dreams of a political formation, the Sangh Parivar, that bases its worldview on fundamentally irrational premises.

But even as this attempt is made the rest of the scientific community in India, outside the atomic energy and defence research sectors, has

remained a silent spectator. There is some evidence, noticed particularly by observers inside the scientific community, that the silence hides a deep unease at the unfolding pattern of events. But very little of this has been visible. The interventions by senior scientists in the post-Pokhran debate have been markedly limited, characterised by an unwillingness to come to grips with the central issue of the correctness or otherwise of the decision to test and the subsequent path of nuclear weaponisation. Some of them have weakly defended the claims of scientific achievement, a defence that must appear to thinking laymen and non-scientists as merely an unwillingness to criticise their colleagues.

**I**n all countries with a developed scientific community, the national academies of sciences and engineering have seriously engaged with the issues raised by nuclear weapons, and have expressed their independent evaluation of what their country's nuclear policy should be. In striking contrast, the academies in India appear to have been stunned by Pokhran II into silence. Even while the declaration of nuclear weapons status by India has led to grotesque celebrations, India's scientific leadership, has not stepped out in public to speak up for sobriety and educate citizens on the scientific truth of the horrors of nuclear war.

The few voices from the scientific community that have spoken up come mainly from young scientists in the network of national laboratories and some others from institutions of higher education across the country. One hopes that these voices, though still a minority, will contribute actively to eventually help turn science in India more firmly in the direction of peace and development.

# Security, morality and national pride

VINOD RAINA

AS the dust (euphoria) from the five nuclear tests at Pokhran in mid-May settles down, the real issues (like the consequent radioactivity) need serious and sustained attention. The future of millions in the sub-continent depends on our ability to grapple with competing interests, within and between the two countries, India and Pakistan, in a peaceful manner.

Among a host of reasons that have been advocated favouring nuclear weaponisation in this country, two stand out – national pride and security. Consider national pride first. Jingoistic scenes immediately after the tests and statements by national leaders and sections of the national media suggest the tests indicate a great achievement of our science and scientists, one that has enhanced our national pride immensely. Whereas the prime minister suggested adding *vigyan* to the two prevailing *jai's*, *kisan and jawan*, The Times of India editorially saw the tests as the triumph of *gyan vigyan*. As a *jai vigyan* and *gyan vigyan* activist, I find it compelling, as would thousands of my co-activists of the People's Science Movement (PSM) working in different parts of the country, to respond to such exhortations. If science and scientists are to be glorified by the *jai vigyan* slogan, should it be for reproducing an old technology meant for mass destruction? Likewise, does arming oneself with such weapons indicate *gyan* (wisdom)?

At the heart of the PSM movement in the country is the realisation that science has been used for destruction, whereas the need is to use it for people's development—for providing

education, drinking water, basic health, security to small agriculturists and manufacturers, local area planning, watershed development and so on. The PSM movement uses the term *gyan vigyan* precisely to denote that science without wisdom is destructive. That these terms have been appropriated by politicians and their supporting media to glorify weapons of destruction needs to be strongly protested against. Do these nuclear tests indicate such a stupendous scientific achievement that we ought to feel unbounded national pride? And is raising moral questions about the possession of weapons of mass destruction tantamount to nurturing an anti-national feeling?

A cursory look at the history of atomic physics would reveal that most of the seminal and path-breaking scientific work that led to the bomb (nuclear fission) was completed by 1940. The technology was worked out by 1945, confirmed first by the successful test at Alamogordo and later by the devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Many scientists saw James Chadwick's discovery of the neutron in 1932 as a key to atomic fission, and speculation that the powerful forces holding together the nucleus of the atom could be released surfaced immediately thereafter.

Having been rebuked for not attending a meeting of a British committee of experts on defence against enemy submarines, one of the greatest among the atomic scientists and head of the Cavendish Laboratory where Chadwick worked, Ernest Rutherford retorted thus, 'Talk softly, please, I have been engaged in experiments

which suggest that the atom can be artificially disintegrated. If it is true, it is of far greater importance than war.'

Engaged in rivalry, sometimes bitter, in the interpretation of experiments regarding artificial radioactivity with their German counterparts Otto Hahn and Lise Meitner, the French couple Joliot and Irene Curie while receiving the Nobel prize in Physics in 1935 commented, 'We are justified in reflecting that scientists who can construct and demolish elements at will may also be capable of causing nuclear transformations of an explosive character...' The possibility struck the Hungarian physicist Leo Szilard, who hated war and military, as a thunderbolt: 'It occurred to me in October 1933 that a chain reaction might be set up if an element could be found that would emit two neutrons when it swallowed one neutron. At first I suspected beryllium, then some other element like uranium. But for some reason or the other the experiment was never carried out.'

**B**ut many others did carry out the experiments, notably Enrico Fermi at Rome. Though they did not realise that they were witnessing nuclear fission for a couple of years, the realisation that it was possible and had already been achieved finally dawned on the awe-struck scientists spread all over Europe and many who had taken refuge in America to escape Hitler's fascist persecution and war.

The technology of the atomic bomb is more than 50 years old, and predates the transistor, the chip and obviously the computer, jet propulsion for both aircraft and missiles, lasers and the lot. On the threshold of the 21st century the science and technology of the atomic bomb, both of the fission and fusion kind, along with electricity, motor transport and wireless transmission, is old technology.

One wonders, therefore, why political leaders and the somewhat irresponsible media are projecting the 1998 tests as a matter of great scientific achievement and national pride.

**T**he sense of achievement, certainly in the political and government controlled technocratic quarters, may be an expression of the success of the clandestine nature in which a nuclear programme has to function in countries like India and Pakistan in the prevailing international nuclear regime, replete with mandatory disclosures and checks on fissile materials and nuclear facilities. But that clearly needs to be distinguished from glorifying scientific achievements. Fooling the American spy satellites from observing the preparations at the test site may be of great tactical value militarily, but it by no means measures up as a great scientific achievement. Maybe the confusion is deliberate, since the clandestine nature cannot be publicly acknowledged. Projecting it as 'a great scientific achievement' is a good cover to fan nationalistic passions and try and win mass support for something that is otherwise morally and ethically abhorrent.

The moral and ethical questions about nuclear weapons are irrevocably entwined with their scientific history, existing much before they struck home in full force after the horrors at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The very scientists who pieced together the fission puzzle were greatly perturbed by what they were doing. In their histories one discerns, if at all, a muted sense of achievement and glory in their doings and more concern for the consequences. It must be remembered that they were working at a time when fascism was taking over Europe and many of them, concerned that rampaging Germany may make the ultimate weapon and put a permanent

stamp of fascism on the entire world, in their error, gave the secrets to the Allies, and then there was no stopping. One such scientist, Paul Langevin, tried to console a student of history who had escaped Germany thus, 'You are taking it much too seriously,' said he. 'Hitler? It won't be long before he breaks his neck like all other tyrants. I'm more worried about something else. It is something that, if it gets into wrong hands, can do the world a good deal more damage than those fools who will sooner or later go to the dogs. It is something that – unlike him – we shall never be able to get rid of: I mean the neutron.'

Leo Szilard was the most energetic among the atomic scientists to make his community realise the possible consequences of splitting an atom. As early as 1935, he approached a number of atomic scientists and asked them whether it would not be advisable, in view of the dangerous consequences of their present studies, to refrain, at least for the time being, from publishing any future results of their investigations. His suggestion for the most part was repudiated.

**D**espite this many of these precursors of post-World War II science, who took the entire world for their province, considered the moral consequences of splitting the atom deeply. 'Deny the powerful and their warriors entry to your workshops,' they warned the coming generation of research workers, 'for such people misuse the holy mysteries in the service of power.' Little did they realise that their suggestion to President Roosevelt to counter a possible German atom bomb would lead to the Manhattan project actually fabricating such a bomb to be used, not against a defeated Germany, but a collapsing Japan, and forever enable the powerful and their warriors not only entry

into their workshops, but to take over and control them.

**T**hese snippets from the history of atomic physics should be adequate to indicate that making atomic weapons at the end of the 20th century is merely rehashing an old technology of mass destruction that always works – there is no record of an atomic test that failed. To gloat over it as a great scientific and national achievement without any sense of moral outrage which has been felt by millions since 1945, including by the very scientists who discovered the process, is evidence of a deplorable sense of human values among the powers that be and their warriors in a country where the same powers make such a fanfare of celebrating Mahatma Gandhi's centenary.

There is enough reason to be proud of the scientific enterprise within the country, both in basic and applied sciences. Whether in the area of power, transport, agriculture, health, or basic sciences, the country's scientific infrastructure has shown that it has the ability to function in a self-reliant manner, if allowed necessary support and freedom of functioning. But it is a matter of serious concern that it is precisely in these areas that our abilities are being dented to accommodate competing foreign investments, while the ruling powers are generating a mass hysteria to gloat on our ability to manufacture weapons of mass destruction at enormous costs.

Providing basic health, clean drinking water, sustained power and domestic energy, adequate food and proper education to all the citizens of the country are far greater scientific challenges than manufacturing nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. Sadly, whereas we do have the requisite scientific ability to do so, for which we truly feel proud, the political agendas are at complete vari-

ance with our abilities and people's needs.

National security is the other major reason for opting for nuclear weapons – Pakistan and China cited as immediate threats. Many questions have been and will continue to be raised about such threat perceptions justifying nuclear weapons. If the situation of war in 1945 justified for America the actual use of the weapon, the justification during peacetime is centered on the concept of deterrence. The long experience of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union ought to have been a real lesson for countries like India and Pakistan. The Soviet Union did not finally dissolve due to nuclear bombardment, but due to 'economic weapons' – the costs of manufacture and maintenance of a huge arsenal and all that goes with it, helped reduce it to a basket economy from which the region is yet to recover.

**I**t ought to be obvious that sovereignty is no longer attacked only militarily, but that in a market-based globalised world, it is being increasingly undermined, particularly in countries that have opted for a non self-reliant path and are internally weak, through trade and economy. Heavy investments in defence and the maintenance of a nuclear arsenal can only enhance the economic insecurity of a country like India, while providing an illusion of territorial invincibility. That economic insecurity can lead to disintegration has already been witnessed. Turning the argument around, suppose a country with nuclear weapons attacks another without such weapons, thereby lacking capabilities of deterrence, will that remain a bilateral war? Wouldn't economic compulsions force a distant nuclear weapons state to retaliate against such actions? And is that not deterrence?

If an economically strong country like Japan with so much more at stake, surrounded by nuclear weapon states and unfriendly neighbours, opts for a non-nuclear security option, what compelling reason does India have for nuclear security? That Japan has a security pact with the United States should make it feel more insecure than secure, given their economic conflicts and competition. Yet, Japan continues to exist as a world economic power. Will the Kashmir question be resolved faster now that both governments have demonstrated their nuclear potency? The immediate fallout seems to indicate that the Kashmir issue has got worse for India since third party mediation is now receiving stronger support.

**T**he arguments follow familiar terrain regarding the question of security. Instead of repeating them, it would be more meaningful to re-examine the very concept of security. Issues surrounding the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War phase of international politics have hegemonised the notion of 'security' in the latter half of the present century. Briefly, the two terms, peace and security, have predominantly been used in the context of external aggression, implying that avoiding war between nations is tantamount to sustaining peace, and that the ability to avoid or stand up to external aggression implies defence of the nation, or security. From such a viewpoint, militarisation and war preparedness are seen as acts of defence and security maintenance, rather than as intent of potential aggression, even though the two are clearly interchangeable, and have proven to be so.

How exactly must we understand peace? To see it as opposite of war is too restricted a meaning. There is little doubt that conditions of war, whether in Bosnia, Afghanistan or

Iraq, do create a great deal of insecurity in large populations. Their everyday peace is replaced by a constant worry regarding possible loss of life, property or injury, to themselves or to their loved ones. Peace among warring nations or communities does, obviously, provide a sense of relief and security to the concerned populations.

**B**ut do communities or large populations necessarily live secure lives at times when they are not engulfed by war-like conditions? The answer has to be no. War is an extreme form of conflict and produces special conditions that we associate with the term war. Conflicts can and do exist without war-like conditions, producing varying degrees of insecurity and lack of peace in communities. It is, therefore, essential to make sense of the terms peace and security in conditions where war is absent. Peace and security are conditions under which people and nations may improve their quality of life, live without fear, worry and stress, are secure from injury and loss of life, maintain good health, and pursue vocations, both productive and cultural, in harmony with nature and other groups and communities. Even in the absence of war there is little peace and security of this kind in countries like India and Pakistan.

If the United Nations, particularly through its Security Council, is the agency for ensuring peace among warring nations, development is propagated as the vehicle to utilise such peaceful conditions to make the life of people more secure—from hunger, disease, back-breaking labour and general poverty and impoverishment. The post-war years have seen a blossoming of development with, yes, many localised armed conflicts, though nothing like the Second World War. Yet peace and security eludes large populations of the world. Secu-

rity during peacetime is therefore far more elusive than in conditions of armed conflict.

This is perhaps why the United Nations, cognisant of the fact that human security in contemporary times has been eroded, and has to be explored and ensured in many dimensions, embarked on major interventions in recent years, such as the summits on environment in Rio, women in Beijing, social development in Copenhagen and human rights in Vienna. This is an affirmation of the fact that human security involves all these aspects: environment, food, gender, human rights and basic needs like health, education and welfare. Since these conditions were expected to be met and fulfilled through development, it is therefore a tacit acceptance of the fact that world development as pursued in post-war years has not really ensured such security for large populations. The question of lack of peace and security would, therefore, appear much more linked to the nature and form of development pursued in contemporary times than merely to conditions of armed conflict and war.

**I**t is this question we need to address when thinking of security rather than jingoistic notions of war, which have unfortunately been fanned due to the nuclear weapons programme of the two neighbouring countries. It is a fact that as long as there are countries like the P-5 who enjoy a nuclear status, the world cannot be free of a threat from nuclear war. But complete disarmament cannot be achieved by arming oneself; it can only induce others to do so. And as stated earlier, it is the international controls on availability of fissile materials and technology rather than any great scientific feat that may have hampered other countries from going nuclear, though as has been

demonstrated, particularly by Pakistan, clandestine operations can overcome many of these obstacles.

**E**ven though the present government has given reason to other countries to think of pursuing a nuclear rather than the path of disarmament, it needs to be stressed that a vast majority of Indian people, represented not only by the People's Science Movement but many other movements, do not support such an action. The underlying argument that it has now ensured greater security for the people is highly questionable; that the costs for providing such illusory security shall actually affect true security is already apparent.

The parliamentary bill to declare education as a fundamental right, which was to be introduced in the current session, has been quietly shelved. The financial implications of the bill, somewhat undervalued by a previous committee, required that the government allocate Rs 40,000 crore towards education during the ninth plan. Apparently, the present government feels that such a financial commitment is not feasible, resulting in the bill being shelved.

If the Indian state cannot commit to provide the very basic security that comes with education because of a lack of funds, does it have any right, moral or legal, to embark on an illusory but resource depleting security programme based on weapons of mass destruction? Despite the highly publicised initial jingoism, signifying that the Indian power elites and their city-based advocates had finally found a Viagra for their missing potency, it will hit them hard when ordinary people reject such medication at the hustings the next time around, simply because people need and seek food, gender and social security rather than nuclear weapons based national security.

# The legal status of nuclear weapons

M. SIDDHARTH

ON 8 July 1996, the International Court of Justice (commonly referred to as the World Court) broke the legal silence surrounding the issue of nuclear weapon threat or use. This was an outcome made possible by a prior request of the United Nations General Assembly to the World Court. In keeping with Article 96, paragraph 1 of the UN Charter, the UNGA had requested the premier Court to respond by means of an advisory opinion to the following question: 'Is the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstance permitted under international law?'<sup>1</sup> The Court ruled that nuclear weapon threat or use is 'generally illegal' and that there exists an

obligation to '...pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control' (831). This legal development is indeed a welcome source of support to the ongoing international citizen's campaign aimed at delegitimising these weapons of mass destruction.

However, the finding of 'general illegality' suggests that the process of a comprehensive outlawing of nuclear weapons under all circumstances is far from complete. In its most controversial paragraph, 105(2)E, the Court recorded that it '...cannot conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a state would be at stake...' (831). Nevertheless, the Court, in the main text of the majority opinion qualified the criteria determined by international law for self-defence to be invoked. The Court

\* The author wishes to acknowledge the valuable comments from Kanti Bajpai and B.S. Chimni.

1. International Court of Justice: Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons. 8 July 1996, General List No. 95. *International Legal Materials*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1996, pp. 809-938, p. 819. All parenthesised entries which follow are from the same source.

cited Article 51 of the UN Charter, which requires that 'measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.'<sup>2</sup> The Court also upheld the view that '...a use of force that is proportionate under the law of self-defence, must, in order to be lawful, also meet the requirements of law applicable in armed conflict which comprise in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law' (822).

**T**he World Court played a useful role in examining all legal provisions in international law which were viewed as relevant in the rendering of the July opinion. This involved a detailed consideration of the conventional and customary bases of international law, the principles of international humanitarian law, the issue of force in international relations, the dangers posed to the environment by nuclear weapons and, finally, the question of threats in international engagement between states. Although all these elements remain important to the advisory opinion, what singly retains its fundamental salience is the Court's vindication of the principles of international humanitarian law in armed conflict.

International humanitarian law consists of an amalgam of the Hague Conventions which seek to regulate armed conflict and the Geneva Convention which protects victims of war

as well as civilian populations. The Court cited relevant provisions which serve as a useful reminder of a state's obligations during armed conflict. According to Article 22 of the 1907 Hague Regulations, 'the right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited' (827). The Court also drew attention to the 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration which prohibits the use of weapons 'which uselessly aggravate the suffering of the disabled men or make their death inevitable' (827). In similar vein mention is made of Article 23 of Convention 4 of the 1907 Hague Regulations which prohibits the use of 'arms, projectiles or materials calculated to cause unnecessary suffering' (827).

Besides these provisions, what is of significance is the Court's reaffirmation of the 'intransgressible' principles of customary international law. These include the need to maintain a distinction 'between combatants and non-combatants...consequently never use weapons that are incapable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets' (827).

**S**econd, the Court recognises that, 'It is prohibited to cause unnecessary suffering to combatants: ...accordingly prohibited to use weapons causing them such harm or uselessly aggravating their suffering' and third, 'In cases not covered by this Protocol or by other international agreements, civilians and combatants remain under the protection and authority of the principles of international law derived from established custom, from the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience' (827). The Court also makes mention of a query raised by a 'small minority', '...that these principles and rules had evolved prior to the invention of nuclear weapons and that the Confer-

ences of Geneva of 1949 and 1974-1977 which respectively adopted the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols thereto did not deal with nuclear weapons specifically' (828). The Court, however, confirms that '...there can be no doubt as to the applicability of humanitarian law to nuclear weapons' (828).

**T**he Court also endorsed the continued relevance of the principle of 'neutrality' which was '...aimed at preventing the incursion of belligerent forces into natural territory, or attacks on the persons or ships of neutrals' (829). This law, in the opinion of the Court, is viewed as of '...fundamental character similar to that of the humanitarian principles and rules, is applicable (subject to the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter), to all international armed conflict, whatever type of weapons might be used' (829).

India, among several other states, affirmed the request for a rendition of an advisory opinion by the World Court in response to the United Nations General Assembly Request. The Indian memorial submitted to the Court supported any move towards a finding of total illegality of these weapons of mass destruction. It held '...that declaring the threat or use of nuclear weapons as illegal or unlawful would be a greater deterrent against any irresponsible use than treating such use as legal; and further where such illegal use is still resorted to, the international community would at least have at its disposal the right to condemn the user and demand cessation of the wrongful act and attach such other legal consequences as are prescribed in the law of state responsibility.'<sup>3</sup>

3. Indian Memorial Submitted to the ICJ - Status of Nuclear Weapons in International

2. Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice, United Nations, New York, Chapter 7, Action With Respect to Threats To The Peace, Breaches of The Peace, And Acts of Aggression, Article 51, pp. 27-28.



India's support for a finding of total illegality apart from being endorsed by a number of non-aligned movement (NAM) states also found support among sections from within the Court's own jury. The Sri Lankan judge Christopher Gregory Weeramantry, in an 88 page dissenting opinion appended to the majority opinion argued meticulously in favour of the view that '...the use or threat or use of nuclear weapons is absolutely prohibited by *existing law – in all circumstances and without reservation*' (923).

Ultimately, it is important to recognise that the World Court Advisory Opinion is indeed a positive development in the direction of outlawing these weapons of mass destruction. The Court emphasised '...that it's reply to the question put to it by the General Assembly rests on the totality of the legal grounds set forth by the Court above (paragraphs 20-103), each of which is to be read in the light of the others. Some of these grounds are not such as to form the object of formal conclusions in the final paragraph of the opinion; they nevertheless retain, in the view of the Court, all their importance' (831).<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the Court did not explicitly state that nuclear weapon threat or use is prohibited under all circumstances, it did eliminate situations of nuclear weapon threat or use by affirming that the principles of international humanitarian law do operate in any armed conflict and that '...the use of such weapons in fact seems scarcely reconcilable with respect for such requirements' (829).

Law: Request For Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, Annexure 2, *Indian Journal of International Law*, Vol. 37, No.2, April-June 1997, pp. 244-249, p. 249.

4. See also Richard Falk, 'Nuclear Weapons, International Law and the World Court: A Historic Encounter', *Indian Journal of International Law*, Vol.37, No.2, pp. 149-184, April-June 1997, pp. 156-157.

## Document

*The Indian memorial submitted to the ICJ—status of nuclear weapons in international law: Request for advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.*

THE question whether nuclear weapons could be lawfully used in an armed conflict is regulated by international law, and in particular the law of armed conflicts and by principles of international humanitarian law. Under international law, use of force is prohibited in international relations. The prohibition contained in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter is so comprehensive and fundamental as to be regarded as a *jus cogens* or an obligation of an absolute character. On the basis of this principle it appears clear that any use of nuclear weapons as a measure of use of force to promote national policy objectives would be unlawful.

Most proponents of use of force, without denying the absolute character of the obligation contained in Article 2(4), contend that use of force by way of exercise of an inherent right of self-defence, which is preserved and protected under Article 51 of the UN Charter is admissible. However, the content and the circumstances under which the right of self-defence could be exercised is specified in the UN Charter itself and is related specifically only to an 'armed attack' in the

first instance. The same has to be reported soon thereafter to the Security Council and is subject to its right to take appropriate steps under Chapter VII upon a determination of the existence of a threat to peace, breach of peace, or an act of aggression.

It is further agreed that any use of force in self-defence has to be proportional to the means and ends involved or to the original wrongful use of force. However, the right of self-defence is to be regarded as a provisional measure or a remedy and hence as soon as other means or measures become available, the resort to self-defence through use of force has to cease.

Even though an opinion is expressed that the reference to inherent right of self-defence in Article 51 provides the basis for states to undertake a preventive action in self-defence in the form of self preservation, this, according to a more prevalent view, is not supportable. According to the prevailing view, the qualification of the right of self-defence by the word 'inherent' in Article 51 serves only to emphasise that the right is available to every state regardless of whether it is a UN member or not. Further, according to this view, the fundamental purpose of the UN Charter is to restrict the use of force by states to the utmost extent necessary, keeping in view Article 1(1) and Para 7 of the Preamble of the UN Charter. (See *Encyclopaedia of Public International Law*, Max Planck Institute, vol. 4 (N-2). North Holland Pub. Co., p. 272.)

It is even suggested that where one state preannounces an armed attack against another state, a hardly conceivable practice, preventive self-defence would be lawful!

In view of the above and given the strict limitations on the non-use of force and the right of self-defence, it is our view that use of nuclear weapons in any armed conflict as a first

attack would be unlawful under international law.

The question then for consideration is whether the use of nuclear weapons would be lawful as a measure of reprisal or retaliation if the same is used by an adversary in the first instance. Reprisals or retaliation under international law are also governed by certain specific principles. First, reprisals to be valid and admissible could only be taken in response to a prior delict or wrongful act by a state. Second, such reprisals must remain within reasonable bounds of proportionality to the effect created by the original wrongful act. However, reprisals could not involve acts which are *malum in se* such as certain violations of human rights, certain breaches of the laws of war and rules in the nature of *jus cogens*, that is to say obligations of an absolute character, compliance with which is not dependent on corresponding compliance by others but is requisite in all circumstances unless under stress of literal *vis major* (see G. Fitzmaurice, 'General Principles of International Law', vol. 92, *Recueil des Cours* (1957-II), pp. 119-120).

In other words, a nuclear weapon could not be used by way of reprisal against another state if that state did not commit any wrongful act or delict involving use of force. Second, when a state commits such a wrongful act or delict, the use of force by way of reprisal would have to be proportionate and as such if the wrongful act did not involve the use of a nuclear weapon, the reprisal could also not involve the use of a nuclear weapon.

Third, even where a wrongful act involved the use of a nuclear weapon, the reprisal action cannot involve use of a nuclear weapon without violating certain fundamental principles of humanitarian law. In this sense, prohibition of the use of a nuclear weapon

in an armed conflict is an absolute one, compliance with which is not dependent on corresponding compliance by others but is a requisite in all circumstances.

In view of the above, use of nuclear weapons even by way of reprisal or retaliation, appears to be unlawful.

In any case, if the wrongful use of force in the first instance did not involve the use of nuclear weapons, it is beyond doubt that even in response by way of retaliation, states do not have the right to use nuclear weapons because of their special quality as weapons of mass destruction. It is also clear further that any wrongful act not involving use of force at all under international law could not be redressed or attempted to be met with any use of force, with or without involving nuclear weapons.

This brings us to the question as to the legality of the use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict on the ground that it is open as a measure of last resort under limited conditions and as a matter of military necessity. A basic principle of the law of armed conflict and particularly the international humanitarian law, which is contained in Article 22 of the Hague Convention IV (1907) states that 'the right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited'. Their right in particular is conditioned by Article 23 of the Hague Regulations prohibiting the use of poison or poisoned weapons; the 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibiting projectiles, asphyxiating, poisonous and other gases which incidentally prohibits also the use of weapons which could cause genetic disorders and illness which is likely to prolong for a considerable amount of time; and by the basic principle enshrined in the Declaration of St. Petersburg of 1868 prohibiting any weapon 'which uselessly aggravates the sufferings of disabled men or render their death inevitable.'

Moreover, the very purpose of international humanitarian law is to forbid 'indiscriminate attacks' and demand protection of civilians. 'Indiscriminate attacks' are generally defined as those that are not directed at any single military objective, those which employ methods or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective and those with effects which cannot be limited. In other words, indiscriminate attacks are those of a nature to strike a military object and civilians and civilian objects without distinction.

In addition to the above, the relationship between military advantage and the collateral damage involved also determines the legality of use of a weapon or a method of warfare employed. If the collateral damage is excessive in relation to the military advantage, the attack is forbidden.

Keeping the above considerations in view, it is easy to come to the conclusion that the use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict is unlawful, being contrary to the conventional as well as customary international law because such a use cannot distinguish between the combatants and non-combatants on the one hand and could cause excessive injuries to the combatants making their death inevitable and could even cause widespread and long-term damage which in some cases could even result in what is called a 'nuclear winter'.

However, an opposite view was expressed by some that the law of war or the humanitarian law could not be deemed to prohibit the use of nuclear weapons as that law grew up mostly only touching the old and more marginal weapons. They claimed that nuclear weapons being weapons of modern warfare are outside the scope of such a law. It is also their view that recent attempts to outlaw some newer method of warfare by implications did not outlaw the use of nuclear weapons

in an armed conflict. Citing that almost all states are urging the conclusion of a convention to outlaw the use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict, it is also argued that in the absence of any such convention their use is not prohibited. In the same connection the use of such nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is also cited as an example of such legitimate use.

On the basis of above arguments, it is contended that international law does not provide for any blanket prohibition against the use of nuclear weapons and the legality of any specific use could however be appraised only in the total context of such specific use.

The above arguments in favour of the legality of use of nuclear weapons are convincingly contested. First, it was pointed out that the development of humanitarian law and the specific principles indicated above which have the status of customary international law do not distinguish between major or minor methods of warfare or between major or marginal weapons. Second, some of the earlier opinions regarding the legality of nuclear weapons were not based on information and knowledge now available about the devastating effects of the use of nuclear weapons and their incompatibility with the fundamental norms of humanitarian law. Third, more recent efforts which reiterated that customary law developed on the basis of the earlier declarations or conventions also did not make any distinction between various weapons or methods of warfare. Fourth, the international community often engaged in further clarification, codification and progressive development of the law even when the principles involved in such an exercise are already regarded as well-established in international law.

Examples of this kind of exercise are many and by way of illustration

of 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, various declarations and treaties concluded reiterating the UN Charter principles and the international humanitarian law itself could be mentioned. Fifth, the use of nuclear weapons over Hiroshima and Nagasaki does not make the use lawful if their use is otherwise prohibited by the law. On the contrary, the use of chemical weapons in World War I led to the negotiation of the Geneva Protocol outlawing their further use. The same should apply to nuclear weapons. Violations of international law like any law would only highlight the importance of complying with such law and do not make legal what is otherwise illegal.

The use of nuclear weapons in response to attack by a conventional weapon would not only patently violate the principle of proportionality, but also a nuclear response to nuclear attack would violate the principle of discrimination, humanity, environmental security and probably the principle of neutrality as such an attack would not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants—causing civilian casualties, ravaging the natural environment and contaminating the territory of neighbouring and distant neutral countries. Nuclear deterrence had been considered to be abhorrent to human sentiment since it implies that a state, if required to defend its own existence, will act with pitiless disregard for the consequences to its own and adversary's people.

Another question which arises in relation to the theory of deterrence is whether the keeping of peace or the prevention of war is to be made dependent on the threat of horrific indiscriminate destruction which justifies the stockpiling of such weapons at an enormous expense, in the hope that they will merely act as a deterrent but will not in fact be used. However, those who do not have such weapons would all the time be racing to build

them and those who already have nuclear weapons would continue to develop even more destructive weapons to maintain the superiority necessary for deterrence, and this would keep humanity in the perpetual fear of total destruction. A better and saner way to secure everlasting peace would be to ensure that not only are such weapons never used but also not made. The security of all nations would best be safeguarded by a nuclear weapon free world. If peace is the ultimate objective there can be no doubt that disarmament must be given priority and has to take precedence over deterrence.

The consideration of the question of legality of use of nuclear weapons is incomplete without consideration of the manufacture, production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Since the production and manufacture of nuclear weapons can only be with the objective of their use, it must follow that if the use of such weapons itself is illegal under international law, then their production and manufacture cannot under any circumstances be considered as permitted. Besides, the manufacture and stockpiling of nuclear weapons would constitute a threat of their eventual use.

In this connection reference may be made to the Conventions on Biological Weapons and on Chemical Weapons which, recognising the need to exclude completely the possibility of the use of such weapons, prohibit state parties to develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain the prohibited weapons. Those conventions clearly recognise and provide that the only effective way to prevent under any circumstances the use of a prohibited weapon is to ensure that no state undertakes the production or manufacture or retains such weapons.

Accordingly, where states are in possession of chemical or biological

weapons they are required to dismantle or destroy them under an elaborate procedure specified there in with built-in safeguards of international inspection. The need for these conventions was felt because a number of states had made declarations/reservations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol to the effect that they could use the prohibited gases, poisons etc., in case they were subjected to an attack by such weapons.

The Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention by prohibiting the production, manufacture etc., of such weapons under any circumstances preclude their use even by way of retaliation in cases where they have been used by one party to a conflict.

Thus, the use of nuclear weapons which is otherwise contrary to international law could only be effectively prevented by eliminating completely their production, manufacture and by ensuring the dismantling of existing nuclear weapons.

The production of weapons which have the capacity to destroy all mankind cannot in any manner be considered to be justified or permitted under international law.

It is also argued that declaring the threat or use of nuclear weapons as illegal or unlawful would be a greater deterrent against any irresponsible use than treating such a use as legal; and further where such illegal use is still resorted to, the international community would at least have at its disposal the right to condemn the user and demand cessation of the wrongful act and attach such other legal consequences as are prescribed in the law of state responsibility.

In view of the above, it is submitted that the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstance, whether as a means or method of warfare or otherwise, is illegal or unlawful under international law.

# Making choices

MANJULA PADMANABHAN

[A bedroom. RANU and JEET are sitting in heavy armchairs facing the audience, staring with intense concentration at a bulky contraption with many wires emerging from its rear panel. It is in the place where the TV would normally be. The machine is on. Both watchers are bathed in the lurid glow from its screen. They both hold remote controllers in their hands, half-raised for action.]

[There is a knock on the door]

JEET: Come in.

[Enter HOMI, in haste]

HOMI: Ah...

RANU: You're very late.

JEET: Where's your clicker?

HOMI: (showing it) Here.

JEET: Come on!

HOMI: What's the score? (taking up a position behind both the armchairs, leaning on RANU's)

RANU: Getting there.

HOMI: (staring) My god...

JEET: (pointing) See that corner? All those towns... green! The choice-window will open in our district any minute now. Every household entered on the grid gets three seconds. That's the state-wise breakdown there (pointing) and just above it, the national position.

HOMI: My god. Forty-nine point seven-four-three-three-three-oh-two... shit. It's going to happen.

RANU: We've been waiting since morning.

JEET: The future of our country after all.

HOMI: The world.

RANU: But it's the country we care about, na?

HOMI: (watching the screen) Uh-oh-(starting to raise his clicker)

RANU: Not yet - not yet -

JEET: It doesn't matter. Choices don't register until that green light goes on.

HOMI: (subsiding) It's hard to believe it's really happening.

RANU: Why? It's been two years since we went nuclear. It was bound to happen some day. Or else - why have the bomb? Like having a gun but refusing it to use it when the robbers come to murder us.

JEET: And just look at this system (gesturing towards the machine). It's fantastic. Nothing could more reasonable or logical or democratic. The citizens themselves make the choice.

HOMI: Oh... I don't know. How many people can afford these things? How representative is it really?

RANU: It represents the choices of informed, responsible and wealthy intellectuals. People who have the resources and the ideals crucial for making a nation strong.

JEET: Like us.

HOMI: Do you really think it makes a nation strong to be doing this?

RANU: (sharply) What – are you one of the faint-hearts?

JEET: Look – look! The window's coming our way!

[All three tense up, their clickers raised]

RANU: Ready now – ours is the first neighbourhood on the grid – there's the map now, the first numbers in our series have been highlighted – there's the outer block... the one next to it... the one in front of it... to the side... the other side.

JEET: Now!

[A small green light on the machine starts to blink. Simultaneously, a beam of blinding white light erupts from the top of the machine. The three watchers activate their clickers. JEET's and RANU's flash green, but HOMI's flashes red. The machine's beam registers three red beams, a loud alarm sounds and the beam switches off.

[Silence in the room]

JEET: Shit.

RANU: I don't understand.

JEET: (not looking around at HOMI) It was him.

RANU: What?

JEET: (speaking softly) Him. Homi. It had to be. There's no other explanation. His clicker cancelled ours out.

RANU: (holds her head) Oh my god. My GOD! You fool! You idiot! I told you not to invite anyone – that's what the installation team warned us about – not to trust anyone at the time of the choice!

JEET: How could I suspect him? Known him since school. Bastard. Traitor. That's what you are. You know that? (his tone is deceptively mild. He addresses HOMI without looking at him.)

HOMI: (he has moved back a pace, but remains calm. Looking towards the screen) Not that it'll make a difference. (nodding at the screen) See? That last number's changed. Gone up.

RANU: But not thanks to us. We wanted to be counted too! It was our right! Our duty!

HOMI: And it was my duty to stop you. Or to try, at least. (looks at his clicker) Didn't think it would work so well.

JEET: (through clenched teeth) Bastard.

HOMI: You people don't understand what it means. You don't realize the horror.

RANU: You're a fine one to talk – who's causing the horror, you or us? Stopping us from doing what's right for the country.

JEET: (suddenly jumping up and around to face HOMI) It's the country's PRIDE, dammit! My father died to save this country from the British! And now – I'm not even allowed to press a bloody button in defence of the nation! Do you understand what you've done? It was my chance to be a hero, to make my mark on history –

and now you've gone and – and – bloody – RUINED it. (makes a sudden lunge and catches HOMI by the throat) I should kill you for this.

[The two men struggle briefly but HOMI is in better shape. He is able to prevent JEET from inflicting any real harm while making no retaliatory moves. The fight does not last long and JEET draws back before making an ass of himself]

JEET: (coldly) You're not worth the effort. Get out of my house this instant. I never want to see you again, hear from you, hear your name.

HOMI: And you won't! (gesturing towards the machine) The way those numbers are rising, in just over an hour and a half, maybe, none of us will be in a position to hear any names. Or anything else for that matter.

RANU: What's this nonsense you keep talking.

HOMI: Radioactive ash, that's what we'll be.

JEET: What d'you think – we're fools? Villagers? Maniacs? Traitor! Get out, get out.

HOMI: (stubbornly) – or worse. We could survive, after all. For a few hours. A few days. Weeks. Not that we'd want to survive. Our skin will be peeling off in sheets. Our clothes will be scorched onto our backs. Our eyes will melt down our cheeks. And the pain. We can pray that there won't be anyone left around to record our pain – but there probably will be. Plenty of remote-controlled recorders – at a safe distance of course – a great distance. There won't be any tourists visiting to see the Taj in a LONG while ... no. There probably won't be much of the Taj left to see. Or anything much else. We'll be the scenic sights soon. Whatever bits and pieces remain. Like the charred corpse that became an icon of the Iraq war. We'll be immortalized, some of us. With our mouths hanging open in screams heard only in nightmares. Made into posters. Carved in black granite. Tasteful memorials of tasteless deaths. Hard to say who among us. Hard to say which parts of us. Unlike Nagasaki and Hiroshima – today there are satellite cameras to watch us at a safe distance, Internet to hear us screaming! Maybe they'll use our voices! Make a famous choral arrangement out of it! Five thousand years of civilization – poof! One and a half billion people – poof! Uncounted treasures of art and culture and natural resources – poof!

[The other two have not been listening to him. RANU is holding her head and JEET is fiddling with the buttons of his clicker. His efforts result in different displays appearing on the screen on the machine. The screen is not visible to the audience, but the changes in light and colour are reflected on all three watchers]

JEET: Oh shut up. (still fiddling) It's not as if anything you're saying is news to us.

HOMI: Then how can you be so irresponsible! HOW!

RANU: (looking up) It's very simple. Only total morons would be unable to work it out. It's either us or them, na? If we don't drop the bomb on them, they will drop it on us. If that is the case, at least let us be first? Na? I mean, it's so obvious.

HOMI: First or last what does it matter! No-one will survive this conflict! No-one will be around to savour this victory! What is the point!

JEET: People like you are such ninnies. Of course some people will die. That always happens – some people are dying all the time. Of hunger, of disease – what's the difference if they die of the bomb instead? At least they'll be dying in the name of the country's prestige!

HOMI: You're not afraid of being the ones to die, are you?

RANU: NOT AT ALL! (holds her head up proudly) If our parents and grandparents could give their lives for the freedom struggle, then we can give our lives for the pride of the nation.

HOMI: There's no pride attached to being the first to drop the bomb on innocent civilians.

JEET: Yet, look at America? Didn't they drop the bomb? Didn't they rewrite history so that they can forever look shamefaced but all the time making more and more bombs themselves? Dropping them god knows, here, there, everywhere – who can say? They're the ones controlling the news with their CNN, their BBC, who can say whether they have been quietly dropping bombs on Russia, Cuba, the moon. But if they can make bombs and drop them, so can we! Huh! These westerners! Think they're so smart! Think they know more than us – with their soft drinks and their chicken burgers! We'll show them.

HOMI: We certainly will. We'll show them how well two desperately poor nations can fall into the traps of cynical arms dealers – and perhaps scientists too – who don't care either way what happens to a billion and a half starving peasants – don't you understand? Nothing that we do is considered proud or glorious in the eyes of the West. They see us as miserable, starving, worm-infested, plague-ridden lepers! And vain and arrogant to boot. And breeding like cockroaches in an open sewer. What do they care if we blow ourselves up? As far as they're concerned, countries like ours, which don't contribute patentable ideas to either technology or entertainment, whose only offering to the planet's wealth is more hungry mouths, whose average quality of life is lower than that of the pets they keep

in their homes – we just don't matter. Who knows? Maybe they've engineered this situation – maybe they want us to cancel ourselves out of existence, make the world lighter by a billion heathen souls – make more place for themselves.

RANU: Poor man or rich – everyone respects a loaded gun.

HOMI: Not if it's being held by a chimpanzee.

JEET: Are you calling us chimpanzees?

HOMI: No, I'm calling us misguided. Misguided! Who d'you think designed those bombs? They did. Who d'you think sells those bombs? They do. Who d'you think dies by those bombs? They don't.

RANU: We've all got to die some day. At least if we die this way, we'll be dying for the nation. That's better than just dying of – of – old age! We'll die as warriors, as martyrs. Let the west think what it likes – we don't care. We've still got to defend the nation.

JEET: And even if we all die – though we won't. There are too many of us. But even if we do – so what? There are enough of us abroad. Enough to keep the nation's flag flying. All those NRIs – they'll be able to come back at last, take over from where we left off – rebuild our glorious heritage from scratch.

HOMI: Glowing with radiation.

RANU: Ahh – you and your sissy fears! They've fixed a thousand problems before this, they'll find some way of fixing that.

HOMI: No-one's found a cure for the common cold yet.

JEET: Who's talking about colds? We're talking about radiation. We can overcome radiation – we've overcome five thousand years of history haven't we? And what is radiation after all? You can't even see it. It's so small. Just some sort of new-fangled rubbish – who knows? Perhaps yoga can cure it. Or transcendental meditation. Our rishis will find supernatural ways of combating radiation. Our legends have the answers to the universe. Ycu'll see – the bombs will destroy a billion people? Who cares – another two billion will rise up to take their place. No-one can say that we Indians don't know how to fill a nation with people!

HOMI: How easy it is to be callous about the lives of others!

RANU: And our children will survive, after all. Most of them, anyway.

HOMI: Yes. I was waiting for you to bring up the subject of your children.

JEET: In the end – that's all that matters. And frankly, let's be crude: those of us who matter, those of us who have invested well and care about the nation's future – we've sent our children abroad. So all right, maybe the

country's been in a bit of a mess recently – but when this-all is over, and both sides have blown themselves up to bits – there'll still be the children. Our children. They'll come back. They'll be proud of what their parents did for them.

HOMI: By sending them abroad, you mean? By protecting them from the hardship of growing up in their own glorious heritage?

JEET: Don't be stupid. When they go there, they're safe from the dangers of growing up here. After all, here there is pollution, disease, this and that. There they will learn whatever there is to learn about modern life, then when they can come back, they can teach it to us.

RANU: (suddenly) Look – just look at the screen! The numbers are climbing like anything!

HOMI: Have you spoken to your children recently about their views on life? Have you ever wondered why they don't write so often any more?

RANU: Just look – even if we couldn't add our votes – at least the rest of the country is going ahead.

JEET: They're busy, that's all.

HOMI: Maybe you should ask them yourself.

JEET: How can we? They're in the States.

[HOMI steps back a pace and knocks on the door. Immediately, two young people enter. They are BOO and DAX, dressed in tank tops and shorts. BOO is a well-fleshed young woman whose hair has been dyed magenta. DAX is six feet tall and wears rings all over his face]

BOTH: (unenthusiastically) Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad.

RANU: (standing up) Bharati! Ishan! Wh-what are you doing here!

DAX: (adenoidally) We just hadta come Mom – we just hadta tell ya that what y'all are doin' is WRONG!

BOO: We learnt all about it in our social science classes.

DAX: And we're, like, really, really PISSED.

[Both parents look bewildered]

BOO: He means, like, it's really UNCOOL to drop bombs, okay, Mom? I mean – hey. Dropping bombs is for nerds, okay? Dad? I mean, I hadta write a paper last week about my home culture and roots and stuff? And this nuclear deal was going down? So my class was like, what's with your country, you know? So you know what? I – I – (pause, shrug) changed my country.

RANU: What...?

BOO: (tosses her head defiantly) I said I was – was – half-black, half-Mohawk! I said that my real parents died when – when we were on the trail and then I was kidnapped by these, like, alien tourists? Who came to see the Niagara Falls? And they took me all the way to India and now – everyone thinks I'm from that dumb

country where no-one does anything but drop bombs all day! Destroying the earth's habitat and all the chipmunks and orangutans and stuff. So I said it wasn't true and that I'd never felt at home in that place and that to prove that I wanted to save the world from all those mad Indians I'd go and tell my, like, foster parents to just stop being so weird. And you know what? My whole class cheered! They even paid for my ticket so that I could come and talk to you guys.

DAX: Yeah, Dad. The same for me. It's really weird. It's really spooky. I mean, bombs. Who needs them? I said I was from Tonga. Or Siberia. Anywhere but India – India's like bad news, Dad. I'd be lynched if I said my own parents were sitting here dropping bombs on the opposition.

BOO: We just thought we'd come home and tell you that – Mom? Dad? – we really love you, but – hey. We've grown up.

[JEET and RANU are looking shell-shocked]

HOMI: (looking at the screen) How sad. All this effort, all this time – all to waste. (he points at the screen) We've run out of time, all of us.

RANU: Why d'you keep saying things like that!

HOMI: (pointing again) See for yourself – we're just minutes away from the fifty-percent mark!

JEET: How little you understand. Reaching the fifty-mark means that fifty percent of all Indians are in favour of dropping the bomb on our enemies! Who's running out of anything? They'll be vapourized! And we'll be safe and fearless!

DAX: What? You mean – you mean – it's happening? Like... now?

JEET: (squaring his shoulders) Some day, my son, you'll think back to this moment and be proud of your father. Of the ideals he stood for. Of the brave, strong and vibrant country that he – and others like him – built, out of the blood, guts and atoms of –

BOO: But – DAD! There won't be anyone left! Nuclear war reformats the planet, Dad! Control-alt-delete, no retry, no save. Grand general failure of the whole programme.

RANU: Bharati – where did you learn to speak to your father in that voice?

DAX: In high school, Mom. The same American high school that you and Dad sweated bricks to send us to. You thought you were sending us for an upgrade but... too bad. They couldn't upgrade us without changing our DOS. Now our systems are incompatible. Error messages every time we open our mouths.

HOMI: (staring at the screen) Such a waste. Such a waste!



JEET: (squaring his shoulders even more) All right. I can't understand most of what you're saying, but never mind. One day, you will understand me. One day, you will stand tall.

HOMI: – and supposing, instead of our striking them when we reach the fifty-mark, they strike us first? Supposing their citizens are also standing in homes just like this one, watching their versions of these machines, watching the numbers mount past fifty – and what if they did all of that just half an hour before we did?

[There is a brief silence – then from the machine, an alarm sounds]

RANU: (in a hushed voice) The fifty-mark.

[Clicks from the machine]

MACHINE: (in a tinny, mechanical voice) Fellow citizens. Thank you for having chosen the safe and democratic option of nuclear war. You will be relieved to hear that this electronic referendum has not been in vain. Fifty percent of all those who invested in this great nation's security by buying the NuclearMate Optimizer have revealed their choice: we shall drop the bomb on our vile oppressors across the border. By the time this message is completed, the warheads will have been armed. Bring out the coconuts. Let this be a time of rejoicing. In one hour, Indian Standard Time, our beloved and ancient nation will heave a sigh of relief. Our enemies will have been vanquished. Our great and courageous leaders, who have been forced to take refuge in nearby Madagascar, will finally be able to return to their homeland in safety. *Jai hind*.

[More clicks. A digital version of the national anthem plays]

JEET: (waits only a brief moment) There! See? What did I tell you? You didn't believe me! (going up to HOMI) You fool! You custard-blood! You cheese-cloth! It's past the fifty-mark and – NOTHING'S HAPPENED!! (goes to DAX) Do you see, my son? The error of your childish, unmanly ways? (goes to BOO) And as for you, young woman, just you wait till I can spare the time to give you a good spanking! That's all you need – a spanking! For being a stupid, stuck-up, misguided lump of puppyfat! Don't you worry! We'll settle your hash in no time! Yes –

HOMI: (coldly) You heard what the thing said. One hour. It takes one hour for us to deliver our weapons to their side. That means it takes them one hour too. That means, if they had the same bright idea that we did, then even as we speak, their planes are streaking towards us. (consults his watch) That means we have fifty-seven minutes before we know if their referendum was timed exactly in phase with ours.

BOO: (consulting her watch) Fifty-six.

DAX: (consulting his pager) Fifty-five point five.

HOMI: (smiling slightly) Fifty-five...

JEET: You're all mad! Mad as hatters! We've won, I tell you! WON! There'll be peace on the subcontinent at last! No Members of Another Community within fifty yards of any horizon! Overnight, even the miserable specimens who should have left for their homeland across the border when they had the option will be forced to recognize the error of their ways, yes! And they will bow their heads in shame before our gods! And crawl away into oblivion, yes – because, what else can they do, when we don't accept converts? And at last we will be one nation! Forever and ever, AMEN!!!

[From outside, a faint drone]

RANU: Shh! What's that?

HOMI: (no longer smiling) Aircraft. Fighters.

DAX: (hushed voice) Oh... shoot. Planet reformat.

HOMI: (to JEET:) So it seems you were wrong after all.

JEET: I don't care! I don't care if we all go up in smoke! I don't care, yes, even if I lose my children! They seem to have become worthless shits – and the world won't miss them! At least we weren't cowards! At least we didn't lose nerve in the face of a challenge! We showed the world what we could do – and now we've done it! Let the world tremble in fear! Let them mess their pants!

HOMI: If there's anyone left.

RANU: You thought we'd be destroyed as soon as the counter reached the fifty-mark. But we're still here. So you were wrong about that. You might be wrong about everything else too.

[The drone is louder]

BOO: (turning to her brother) Do you believe in heaven, Dax?

DAX: Yeah. Maybe. Depends.

[The drone is louder still]

JEET: You're all pampered, cotton-witted, pumpkins! Nothing's going to change, you'll see! These are just our own jets, flying overhead on their way to deliver the bombs!

BOO: See you there then? (she holds out her hand to him)

DAX: (takes her hand fondly) Yeah. It'll be cool.

JEET: And when it's all over and we can all look back on this shameful episode, you'll be GLAD you were Indian! You'll be GLAD you came back to your motherland! You'll be GLAD you belong to a forceful, virile nation! You'll be GLA –

[Total blackout]

# Comment:

## Duodecennial

MANY moons ago I sat near the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya and watched over a lakh Himalayan Buddhists quietly mumble through labour pangs of enlightenment. Some were circumambulating, chanting their *mantras*, rosaries slipping fast through their fingers and prayer wheels rumbling with infinite patience. Others clanged cymbals whose notes either pierced one's ears or shook one's bones. Thousands of monks and laity from the four directions prostrated with gymnastic fury to the Buddhas of the four quarters. Thousands of butter lamps and clutches of incense smoked out the base of the temple. The spire which rose out of smoke and

light seemed like a rocket, fuelled by devotion, about to take off.

Away from the temple the kids played, men drank and gambled, women slogged at their daily grind. They were there to participate in a ten day initiation ceremony presided over by the Dalai Lama. The deity whose blessings, power and knowledge they sought was *Kalachakra*, the Wheel of Time. Near the Bodhi tree, presumably where Gautama, a prince of the Sakya clan was enlightened, a carved image in stone of the Starving Buddha watched his devotees shuffle past. Gautama Buddha, the Compassionate, successor to

Rama in the Vishnu *avatar* cycle must have felt pleased. Four moons later, which legend tells us is the moon under which the Buddha was born, reached enlightenment and gained immortality, he was certainly not smiling. The wheels of time were rolling. This was January 1974.

On the full moon of May 1974, one year before Indira Gandhi, a woman besieged by her own hallucinations, decided to castrate India, the Government of India conducted its first fatal affair in Pokhran. Then as now, two duodecennial cycles later, there was orgiastic jubilation. Ours was a nation which would stand up and be noticed, a nation whose potency no one could doubt, a nation which would flaunt its credentials to its bigger neighbour. 'Remember one duodecennial cycle ago when you humiliated us with the size and might of your guns, never again.' The frenzied prime minister of India expected the nation to want more, more of the same delight, more of the same willingness to go out and conquer. But the nation had other ideas; banal thoughts of *roti, kapda aur makan*, and the right to exercise its democratic prerogative. It was time for the angry young man to erupt.

The legend of Amitabh Bacchan began with the release of *Zanjeer* in 1974. The hero spoke little, sang no songs, and with celluloid ease Inspector Vijay dispensed justice as his Muslim brother in arms, Pran, sang, *Yari hai iman mera/ yar meri zindagi/ Pyar ho bando se ye/ Sabse badi hai bandagi*. A brooding Vijay is haunted by a recurring nightmare, a white charger galloping with menace towards him. The menacing nightmare of a horse is an unashamed inspiration from the film *Death Rides a Horse* with that arch baddie Lee Van Cleef. The white horse as a symbol of Armageddon is of course nothing original, specially in the Hindu psyche; Kalki, the tenth avatar, successor to the Buddha, rides a white horse and with celestial lightening and thunder he brings down the curtain on *Kali Yuga*, and with that annihilates the curse of Time. There is no tomorrow.

There was an elegant angry man, relatively young then, whose rage was not dampened by the thought of The Day After; a man who put to sleep Madame G's euphoria, and that too only a month after her little bomb. He was not over forty years old and so one trusted him. His oratory was incendiary, his charisma virile, and like Inspector Vijay he had little patience for bureaucracy. He was a man on the fast track.

It seemed at the time as if everyone wanted to run faster than they could walk. The Left, which was more red then, the Right, which was less saffron, and even

those who were ideology-free like the ruling hawks were in a hurry to reach political *nirvana*. They all had one common love, the bomb. The Left loved it because their fraternal comrades had a few lying around. The Right because it was a symbol of patriotic prowess, and the ideology-free for the simple reason that to have one is better than not to. The angry young man of virile disposition was magnificent, spouting pink rhetoric, a pacifist who loved to bomb. In April '74 he was busy shunting forces across the country. He was the tiger (skt. *vyaghra*) who roared in the face of Durga.

In the same month, millions had gathered at Hardwar for the *Mahakumbha mela*. They came from all corners of India seeking salvation, bearing tales of local discontent, uprisings, and repression. The naked listened to the clothed. The enlightened sighed gravely to the idiot savant. Things were truly miserable, *kumbhapunya* notwithstanding. There is a theory that in times of depression a person sublimates his/her sexual energy and mutates love, sensitivity and joy into hate, callousness, and self-obsession... the Inspector Vijay syndrome.

All these qualities are, of course, glossed over with the sheen of patriotism and the rhetoric of progress and change. A near perfect model for this in 1974 was the angry young Sanjay Gandhi who, protected by his mother's veil, ran rampant through the dank corridors of power with half-cocked notions for a nation's salvation. At the *Kumbha* the naked ones were not impressed with Sanjay's posturings, certainly not by a portly Babaji called Avidyanath, who was far too preoccupied with internecine warfare in the Nath sect. His Gorakhpur *math* had become a den for criminal activities and the politicians of change, in his case the Jan Sangh, were demanding accountability. His angst, however, was not shared by the babajis who sat round the *dhunis*. They smoked their way to glory and forgetfulness; a *brahmachari's* lot is not an easy one.

Mahant Avidyanath has come a long way since then, both in his rotund dimensions, his wealth, and his preoccupations. The man, even though he is called a saint, is preoccupied not with the yogic tradition of Goraknath, but with a spire in Ayodhya; the celibate in search of a *parivar*. At the *Kumbha mela* in Hardwar in 1998, I was witness to a congregation where *asuraic* chill crept into one's marrow. It was a closed door affair, with only members of the sect present. Fascists always sound reasonable. Simplistic arguments are persuasive because they only address insecurities and offer instant solutions. 'Till we rid the nation of the alien

religion of Islam the Hindus will never be free. Kill a Muslim if you have to, it is not a sin. We have a government today that will protect you. I guarantee you that,' the fat 'saint' croaked while the lumpens in their garb of the ascetic listened.

Today, there is more money than Kuber can dream of in the temple and *sadhu* coffers, and it is difficult for a babaji with ambitions to marble his ashram to raise a voice of yogic dissent. Under the two acre tents on the left bank of the Ganga, at Hardwar, in hushed pious tones the mendicants in silk robes harangued the faithful to build a temple of mortar and stones. There is a homilie in the *tantras* which says that one is a worshipper of Shakti, the primal force of creation, within oneself, with Shiva as the vision, bearing the calm and peaceful countenance of a Vaishnava.

At the 1998 Kumbha a Naga baba of unfamiliar antecedents took it upon himself to build a temple on a small and shifting sand bank facing the grandest *haveli* on the waterfront. The sparkling white three storey mansion, with its own private *ghat*, was built by Sriman Rai Bahadur Das Jugal Kishore Birla Pilaniwala as a *dharamsala* in the thirties. Today, it is the spiritual retreat of the Khaitan family which bases itself in Calcutta, Jhunjhunu and Mumbai. It mostly lies empty, but not neglected. The family retainers clean and polish the cavernous halls of marble and teak. The thousand volumes in an eclectic library are stacked behind glass-fronted bookshelves. A portrait of The French Mother of Pondicherry looks sternly down at the works of Romain Rolland, John Le Carre, Jackie Collins, Enid Blyton and, of course, Sri Aurobindo.

There is an apocryphal story that an elder of the Birla clan was told by a soothsayer decades ago that as long as the family had a temple in construction its fortunes would never sink. For three days I watched the baba, naked with his matted locks carelessly flying in the breeze, build the temple with boulders dug out from the riverbed, piled on top of each other to form a four foot high Mount Kailash. With the placing of each boulder he would dance the jig of a madman howling to an invisible god. On the day of the Mahakumbha, 14th of April, the babaji consecrated his temple, sought Shiva's blessing and left the temple in the hands of the melting snows of the Himalaya.

For the angry young man of virile disposition from 1974 the wheels of time have turned. Not only has he aged, we all do, but his politics has taken on ancient hues, a medieval mind that seeks revenge for the failings of one's ancestors, a mind that views power as patriotism, the mind of an ageing Inspector Vijay.

When on the full moon in May this year he and his band of post Viagra politicians detonated the bomb, they, with one turn of the wheel, brought every human being in the subcontinent closer to a collective death; our individual destinies disregarded for the greater good of what I am not sure. Perhaps Inspector Vijay who has now graduated to a grey *Major Saab* has an answer. Alas no. His career has bombed and all he can sing is, 'A Punjabi lass has stolen my heart. A cracker of a Punjabi girl. I feel great.' There is probably many a Punjabi girl in Lahore wistfully cooing to the latest avatar of Amitabh, the postman from Mirinda, 'May your strong blow gently caress my soul.'

The vyaghra is a potent symbol, not only in this country, but across the world. The vyaghra has sold Esso Oil, an up-country tooth powder, a Chinese underwear brand, an American baseball kit firm and of course, the famous balm from Singapore. This animal, whose innards, penis, anus, tooth and nail keeps the Chinese nation on its horns is poached and sold to middle Indian traders, the same lot that roars patriotism at the drop of a *topi*. They are in keeping with our hoary tradition. Shivji sits on a vyaghra's hide, Durga rides her mount, a vyaghra, and taxis and hovels in Bombay have leaping vyaghra's flying out of their windows. The Royal Bengal vyaghra, an endangered species, is rarely seen in the mangrove swamps of the Enchanted Forest today, and yet is the most prolific maneater.

The angry old man, once young and of virile disposition, today spouts mushrooms of vyaghra rhetoric while the Royal Bengal vyaghra's who roamed with the bears in the '70s now meow pacifism. Two duodecennials later the wheel of time has turned many times round. We are a subcontinent, divided by an imperial conspiracy, hell-bent on annihilating ourselves to overcome our impotency. To quote, and very partly translate, a sage-like Englishman, if only for the sake of irony, William Blake's 'The Tiger':

Vyaghra! Vyaghra! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy symmetry

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And watered heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

**Bhaskar Bhattacharyya**

# Books

**UNDERWORLD** by Don DeLillo, Picador, London, 1998.

THE Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'epic' as 'an imaginative work of any form, embodying a nation's conception of its past history,' and in this sense Don DeLillo's *Underworld* is a true American epic. It is a monumental novel, not simply for the time span it covers – from 1951 to 1992 – but because DeLillo, perhaps more skillfully than any other living writer, gives us a sense of not size itself but size's relativity: scale. The slippery conjunction of minutiae of ordinary lives – the 'frail bundle of soma and psyche' which we are – and the almost inconceivable vastness of things which give History its capital 'H': the atomic bomb, the Cuban missile crisis, the dynamics of global capital, AIDS, the production and destruction of waste, environmental pollution – and those words which no longer connote places but events – Vietnam, Chernobyl, Hiroshima, to which dark list we can now add 'Pokhran'.

The other definition of 'epic', which concerns the grand deeds of legendary figures, is as far from the book as it's possible to get, for though DeLillo's is peppered with real historical figures – from Frank Sinatra and J. Edgar Hoover to a staggeringly vivid rendition of stand-up comedian Lenny Bruce, hell's court jester – none are spared the same, surgically precise delineation

of their thoughts, gestures, kinks of character, quirks of speech as the 'ordinary' or non-famous characters who teem through these pages. As Paul Quinn writes, 'No one currently writing has peripheral vision more penetrating than DeLillo's.'

It's well-nigh impossible to paraphrase DeLillo. The way he writes dialogue concedes nothing to 'good literary style'. Instead, he notes and jots, skips and forgets, meanders and interrupts. The impression is that we are not reading but overhearing the accidental, amateurish reality of people's lived lives: imperfect, unplanned, all too human, but not without their moments of wayside grandeur, bravery, loves and loss.

DeLillo launches his narrative on 3 October 1951, the day that the Giants and the Dodgers played a historic game of baseball in New York City. Also, the day that Russia exploded its first nuclear bomb triggering the start of the Cold War. The ball which was hit into the stands to win the match is caught by a young, black kid, Cotter Martin. From the time it leaves his hands that same night, we follow its elusive trail from person to person, down the years. It is finally tracked down by Marvin Lundy, a tireless collector of baseball memorabilia, after 22 years of painstaking searching. Lundy, whose own memory for words is slowly slipping away, has his own theory as to why such an important baseball match was so inexplicably badly attended:

“...Because certain events have a quality of unconscious fear. I believe in my heart that people sensed some catastrophe in the air. Not who would win or lose the game. Some awful force that would obliterate—what’s the word?”

“Obliterate.”

“Obliterate. That would obliterate the whole thing of the game...”

“In other words.”

“In other words there was a hidden mentality of let’s stay at home. Because a threat was hanging in the air.”

“And you’re saying people had an intuition about this particular day.”

“It’s like they knew. They sensed there was a connection between this game and some staggering event that might take place on the other side of the world.”

He also points out that the core of the nuclear bomb is the exact dimensions of a baseball. Both things seem coincidental to a rational mind, and yet, like Brian Glassic to whom Lundy’s explains his unlikely theories, the reader is also caught believing it to be ‘lyrically true... unprovably true, remotely and inadmissably true but not completely unhistorical, not without some nuance of authentic inner narrative.’

It boils down to this: ‘Everything is connected in the end.’ This may, or may not be logical, but it rings lyrically true, and *Underworld* is in many ways the statement’s authentic inner narrative. It is, in part, the suspicion that a butterfly landing in England causing a building to collapse in China is not a piece of philosophical whimsy, but a provable fact: an aerosol sprayed at a Californian armpit chips another few millimetres from the ozone layer, and an extra drip of melt water drops from the tip of an Antarctic iceberg.

The central character in the book, if indeed it can be said to have one, is Nick Shay, a waste management executive, for whom waste disposal is not just a job—it is a calling, a philosophy, an index for understanding the world in which we live:

‘We were... waste giants, we processed universal waste. Waste has a solemn aura now, an aspect of untouchability. White containers of plutonium waste with yellow caution tags. Handle carefully. Even the lowest household trash is closely observed. People look at their garbage differently now, seeing every bottle and crushed carton in a planetary context.’

The problem of nuclear power, as DeLillo forcefully reminds us, is not just that it results in bombs

capable of terrifying devastation, but that the waste generated is just as deadly. It is perhaps no coincidence that the deity from whom plutonium gets its name, was the god of the dead and ruler of the underworld.

In the light of the nuclear tests in the Rajasthan desert, the events described in *Underworld* have an eerie resonance. Klara Sax, a world-famous artist and one-time lover of Nick’s, is working on a massive project—the installation and painting of 230 B-52 long-range bombers in the Arizona desert. When asked why she chose the desert setting, she replies, ‘It’s only logical of course. And it enables us to show our mastery. The desert bears the visible signs of all the detonations we set off. All the craters and the warning signs and no-go areas and burial markers, the sites where debris is buried.’ The images hit even closer to home when Matt Shay, Nick’s younger brother, explains to his girlfriend: ‘Go to the desert or tundra and wait for the visionary flash of light, the critical mass that will call down the Hindu heavens, Kālī and Shiva and all the grimacing lesser gods.’ Is it entirely unconnected that Oppenheimer and Teller used to quote Hindu scriptures to each other as they set about harnessing this divine/demonic power? ‘They are everywhere at the same time, endlessly connected, and you half believe the most implausible things because you’d be stupid not to.’

The ‘curious connection’ between weapons and waste comes to a head when Nick and his colleague Brian Glassic visit a test site in Kazakhstan where Viktor Maltsev, another waste disposal expert, offers them a chilling solution to the ever-increasing problem of waste:

‘He (Viktor) says waste is the devil twin. Because waste is the secret history, the underhistory, the way archaeologists dig out the history of early cultures, every sort of bone heap and broken tool, literally from the ground.

All those decades, he says, when we thought about weapons all the time and never thought about the dark multiplying by-product.

... That’s why we have this idea. Kill the devil. And he smiles from his steeple perch. The fusion of two streams of history, weapons and waste. We destroy contaminated nuclear waste by means of nuclear explosions.’

The connections drawn by DeLillo are not the cause-and-effect ones of Newtonian physics, but are subtle, multivalent, nuanced and supra-logical, more in keeping with this age of quantum mechanics and chaos theory. They turn on the slightest gesture, as

infectious as a yawn. As Nick Shay smears lotion on his arms, driving toward Klara Sax's extraordinary desert artwork, he recalls, gesturally, the almost touching naiveté of Edward Teller applying sun-block before watching the first nuclear detonation. In the 'Museum of the Misshapens' in Moscow, deformed foetuses are preserved in Heinz pickle jars – in a vision straight out of Breugel – and the children of the 'down-winders', the human fall-out of radiation sickness, play the same games of 'it' and 'tag' as the children in the Bronx of Nick's (and DeLillo's) own childhood.

"Do you believe it was intentional?" he asks Viktor, surveying their terrible twisted limbs.

"I believe everything. Everything is true. Every time they did a test, hundreds of towns and villages exposed to radiation. Ministry of Health says, Okay we raise limit again. When limit is passed, Okay we raise again. ... Once they imagine the bomb, write down equations, they see it's possible to build, they build, they test in the American desert, they drop on the Japanese, but once they imagine in the beginning, it makes everything true," he says. "Nothing you can believe is not coming true."

Nick's hope that somehow this might be 'intentional' that, in the end, there may be someone to blame, is understandable, and all too human. God, the State, the Enemy – something to suggest that behind this systemic chaos, this microcosmically interlinked splatter of energies which we sort retrospectively to make history, to make sense – there is a will, an intention.

There is an almost touching nostalgia for the bygone days of Cold War enmity, where They were Them and We were Us and the lines between were clear. Matt, who works for a weapons programme of such sophistication that its operations are hidden even from itself, recalls the bomb drills hammered into them at school by the fierce Sister Edgar with a powerful and sad longing for simpler responses and threats you could point to. Though pitifully inadequate, absurd and even surreal, the instructions as to what to do in the event of a nuclear attack – Cover Your Mouth, Don't Touch Things – brought with them a sense of security and belonging: there were, at least, rules which meant that someone was in charge, someone knew what was going on.

When the Cold War thaws, your enemies no longer have faces. Fear goes underground. In the age of the Internet, the place of conspiracy theory is taken by paranoia. Paranoia becomes not a pathological state but the norm, coincidence takes on the force of logic.

It is what happens when Forster's injunction 'Only connect' meets the late 20th century: global capital, the mass transportation of waste, the nuclear threat, mass media events, the spread of AIDS, the network of networks – you end up with DeLillo's underworld of 'only connections'.

The connections are so deep that they defy logic, and twist on faith. Down on the mean streets of the Bronx, a young girl is raped and murdered. When her image appears to glow from a neon advertising board every time a train goes lumbering by, thousands gather in a spontaneous gesture of faith: a latter day Lourdes in the heart of the city. For all its bleakness, the book is not without its moments of hope, nor of humour – though both appear hard-won, and perhaps all the more precious for that.

In *Underworld*, the globalization of capital and its 'evil twin', the problem of waste, are illuminated by DeLillo's spare and lyrical prose for what they actually are: a single Janus-faced god in a world where the old gods have failed.

Like that other American-epic of paranoia, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose incendiary narrative explodes around the V2 bombs manufactured in Peenemünde by Nazi Germany, DeLillo's *Underworld* also spirals around bombs – and those not necessarily fired at targets, but exploded underground, whose shock waves rock the very foundations of our earth, and whose sinister half-lives condemn generations to come with their own shadowy, misshapen existence. With his unerringly deft delineation of weapons, waste and the end-of-millennium mushrooming of new forms of religious belief, ritualism and the quest for power on heaven and earth, one wonders what DeLillo would have made of the vision of Hindutva evangelists sprinkling the untouchable, contaminated radioactive dust of Pokhran across our corner of the globe.

Anita Roy

**BLACK RAIN** by Masuji Ibuse (tr. John Bester).  
Kodansha International, Tokyo, 1969.

THE Second World War ended on a crescendo of violence. It showed that the annihilating power of the nuclear bomb could wipe out the entire human race. To protest against such acts of destruction, Masuji Ibuse took twenty years to write *Black Rain*. One of the most powerful novels on the nuclear explosion in Hiroshima and its aftermath, it tells the world of the

potential capacity of groups of human beings to destroy each other. The novel has multifarious strands. Japan, its imperial aspirations and World War II, Hiroshima and the atom bomb, the ancient Japanese customs and the Japanese countryside, the everyday preoccupations of the Japanese people: these are the major and minor chords struck fortissimo or pianissimo, sometimes brought together in discordance but without diminishing the main theme in any way. The dominant theme, always present either in the background or foreground, is one of human destruction, of desolation so utterly foreign to human comprehension that the human eye has to record each little detail of the initial incomprehension of the enormity of the scale of devastation, just to keep asking – ‘What was it that had the power to cause all this?’

Ibuse’s eye has captured the details of immediate, senseless death and suffering, and the lingering deaths brought on by radioactivity. He occasionally peers through the diary of a marriageable young girl, Yasuko; he reads the diary of her uncle, Shigematsu Shizuma and the correspondence between Shigematsu and Dr. Iwatake. He glances at the housekeeping accounts and the basic menu of wartime Japan her aunt Shigoko, kept as a careful housekeeper. It reads like a document of real life, in fact it is more like a documentary in places. Shigematsu and Dr. Iwatake’s experience of the bombing was as real as their records of it and of Japan during the war. *Black Rain* therefore subtly weaves fiction and actual records in polyphonic narratives, all speaking in different keys, each one of them distinct and audible to anyone who cares to listen.

Ibuse tracks his characters down to Kobatake, a village hundred miles to the east of Hiroshima, four and a half years after the nuclear explosion, records Shigematsu’s concern for the non-existent matrimonial prospects of his niece as rumour whispered of the possibility of Yasuko carrying ‘radiation sickness’, and then leaves them to do their own talking. The narratives shift from mundane, everyday occupations, human expectations in wartime situations, to the moment of the ‘terrible flash of bluish-white light’ accompanied by a ‘roar of sound’ outside, that was to change, maim or kill hundreds and thousands of lives. Graceful social gatherings like the tea ceremony carrying all the weight of centuries of tradition, polite conversation on train decks, all grind to a halt.

Yasuko’s concern for a small flower clinging to the rock against which she has taken shelter does not stop her from pressing against it harder. Shigematsu

uncharacteristically finds himself yelling as bodies crush against him as pandemonium breaks out in the suddenly stationary train and the crowd begins to spill into the railway station. A society inured to air-raid shelters, routine radio broadcasts, suddenly paused. It sensed that this time it was different, maybe it was a poison-bomb, a new type of oil bomb, but whatever it was, it was deadly. With it a flaky white powder and black rain that would not wash off descended from the sky. A many-hued, monstrous mushroom cloud with a long twisted stalk sprouted high over Hiroshima and hovered there, ominous and threatening. Human beings suddenly developed extensive burns that stripped the skin off, also oozing lacerations and wounds that did not hurt. Automaton-like human beings with vacant faces wandered around pointlessly’.

There is no space for sentimentality in the descriptions of human suffering. At the surface, the accounts are purely descriptive, flat, an attempt to understand a phenomenon that blasted buildings, houses, thousand-year-old camphor trees and reduced the entire city to a sea of charcoal and rubble. What could turn tin-roofing into unrecognizable, round, metallic dumplings, and hurl tiles and pieces of burning timber from the houses like so many lethal projectiles through the air? What could make a charred fragment of sheet music, after having ‘roamed the void for a whole day and night,’ come fluttering down from the skies? Ironically and eerily the lyrical words extolling the cherry blossom – ‘cherry blossom, cherry blossom in the spring’ – on the fragment might remind one of a 17th century Japanese poet, Basho and of peace:

Under the cherry  
Flower guards have assembled  
To chatter  
Their hoary heads together.

Descriptions of death descending unaware on a city humming with military activities, domestic and business pursuits, are sharp like a surgeon’s knife, as vivid as a skillfully wielded paintbrush. The piled-up bodies of dead school children looking like ‘beds of tulip’ from afar and like ‘the layers of petals on a chrysanthemum’ from up close, bodies charred black, bodies lying in grotesque positions, bodies of young women clasping dead infants, bodies piled six feet high in a destroyed temple site now being used as a ‘Reception Centre for Corpses’, and a sheet of flies and stench over all. Dead bodies floating in rivers mocking life by imitating the movements of life induced by the current in the river, pulsing streams of maggots pouring over the cheeks, eyes and mouth giving an impression



of life and movement in a dead body. Death amidst a scene of 'unremitting desolation' as far as eyes could see.

The human mind, buffeted by the macabre and gruesome visions of death, could only revolt at childhood memories of poems applauding the brave deeds of worms – 'Oh worm, friend worm! Rend the heavens, burn the earth, and let men die. A brave and noble sight.' In 'a hell that is tortured with omnipresent, inescapable odour,' human anger could only rail at the memory of poems learnt in childhood obscenely reveling in death and putrefaction in poetic flights of fancy. With the fantasy turning real in his adulthood, when he saw the worms in action, Shigematsu could only say, 'Revolted man!'

Yet these flashes of anger directed 'at no one in particular' come only at rare moments in the narrative. The absorption with and the exactitude of the details of 6 August 1945 remain understated, emotionless and at the same time stark, successfully conveying the day as a human catastrophe of immense magnitude. The everyday similes, gentle, occasionally humorous, welling from minds that had never confronted destruction and death in such dimensions, oddly weld together the gruesome and the everyday lives with familiar images and comforting sounds. A wife in search of her husband, confronted with unrecognizable faces and unidentifiable voices moaning in unison in pain, was irresistibly reminded of 'a chorus of frogs starting up in a paddy field.' Trained nurses and army lieutenants, loudly professing to do things army-fashion, threw science and rules to the winds and treated burn wounds with cucumber juice, an old wives' remedy, instead of using 'Ringer's solution, glucose, salt-solution or something similar.'

The sadness of a disintegrating society that had been at war too long, where all the established norms of behaviour had been destroyed by the war – inconsiderateness, rudeness of army officials in public places, lack of respect for the dead – all coalesced to show up the war for what it was, a colossal waste of men and morals. The waste, never explicitly stated, was not just in the profusion of dead bodies, but in the manner in which food, a precious necessity in a rationed war economy, spilled out, tumbled out in the dirt, proclaiming wanton waste. As frugal people, they were appalled at the waste, used it to ruminate on the futility of war, used it unconsciously as a cultural statement. Like the cooking-rice pot by Shigoko's side as she sat waiting for her husband in the ruins of Hiroshima. Like the spare conversation refusing to indulge in effusion

when confronted with the return of dear relatives long given up for dead. Emotions held tightly reined in, unclouded by theoretical clap-trap, allow the reader to observe the moral and physical outrage on humanity better.

That even such memories and empathy of observers of the victims caught in the raid grow dim after the passage of four and a half years is noted and registered in a life-affirming, philosophical statement that nothing stays still, life moves on, leaving the more unfortunate behind. The shock, the chill that gripped the Japanese people at the display of instant destruction – like a visible giant hand crushing people like ants leaving a slow death for many survivors in its wake – 'radiation sickness' – could also fade in a mere four and a half years. It was therefore perhaps inevitable that the sedentary lifestyle of the victims of radiation would catch the unfavourable attention of the villagers during the busiest part of the year – harvest time. In a confrontation between the 'lucky' radiation victims unable to justify their existence in the hard physical rhythm harvesting time demanded, and an outspoken widow who openly accused them of malingering, 'the normally mild and gentlemanly' Shokichi said angrily:

The people have forgotten that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were atom-bombed. Everybody's forgotten! Forgotten the hell-fires we went through that day – forgotten them and everything else, with their damned anti-bomb rallies. It makes me sick, all the prancing and shouting they do about it (pp. 29-30).

It is both a protest and a comment on the fleeting memory of the world that could forget such a bitter lesson learnt at a great cost. Shokichi had pronounced the epitaph that can be applied to the world we live in today.

**Anindita Mukhopadhyay**

**MAINTAINING NUCLEAR STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA** by Neil Joeck. Adelphi Paper 312; Oxford University Press, New York 1997.

**STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA** by Ashley J. Tellis. RAND Documented Briefing, Arroyo Center, 1997.

MAY 1998 marks a critical moment in the nuclear history of the subcontinent. India and Pakistan renounced their hitherto held positions of strategic ambiguity and made the transition to being declared nuclear weapon states. A crucial question which assumes salience in the light of these developments

relates to the implications of the overt nuclearisation of the subcontinent and more specifically what this entails in terms of regional stability.

Two recent monographs seek to directly address this issue. Although these were written prior to the nuclear tests conducted in India and Pakistan, they were premised on the fact of existential nuclear deterrence in the subcontinent and the recognition of developments (on both sides) in the delivery and deployment technologies associated with these weapons of mass destruction. Since both authors have divergent assessments of the prospect of stability in South Asia, they provide us with the contours of the debate taking place outside the country. They also find echoes within the subcontinent among different domestic constituencies.

A couple of basic assumptions undergird Neil Joeck's appraisal of the prospects of nuclear stability in South Asia. First, there is a recognition of the unlikelihood of nuclear rollback in the near future and second, the development of delivery vehicles (like the short range ballistic missiles) as an important element of the ongoing nuclearisation of the subcontinent. The broad argument the author seeks to make in his work is that nuclear weapons do not contribute to stability in the region and, further, do not eliminate the possibility of nuclear war in a nuclearised environment. Nuclear weapons, he argues, fail to reverse the tide of historical animosity between India and Pakistan and do not explain the absence of a major war in the subcontinent since 1971.

The hypothesis of nuclear instability is further vindicated in the author's assessment by empirical evidence stemming from the Operation Brasstacks crisis in 1987. Scenarios of 'inadvertent escalation', 'misperception' of conflicting parties and an inability to control the 'pace' of crisis – all seek to suggest that nuclear weapon use in war cannot be ruled out. Another factor which Neil Joeck believes will further complicate the situation is the nature of domestic politics in the region. Although the author concedes that India is not likely to be the initial aggressor, as it is perceived to be domestically stable, the same confidence is not expressed in his assessment about Pakistan. He argues that a *pot pourri* of Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) tensions, Sunni-Shia conflict and the Taliban crisis could be potentially destabilising, enhancing the prospect of war in South Asia.

Although none of these scenarios are regarded as 'pre-mediated', Neil Joeck rejects the claim of a natural stability in South Asia emanating from a minimal deterrence in the region. The logical pursuit of the

argument leads him to provide prescriptions which in his view would enhance stability in the region and minimise the risk of nuclear use. The issues of command and control are an important element of this inventory of nuclear management and would involve a series of measures. These could range from decoupling of nuclear warheads with delivery vehicles, storage of nuclear material in diverse sites to prevent unauthorised seizure, and setting up of mechanisms such as the permissive action links to minimise nuclear risk. However, this would only be a part of the package and would have to be complemented by diplomatic efforts. These efforts, the author concedes, have borne results in the past, which is reflected, for instance, in the agreement arrived at by India and Pakistan not to attack each other's nuclear facilities.

Another element which engages Joeck's attention relates to the relationship between conventional forces and nuclear weapons. The line of argument offered is that conventional forces would need to be in a state of preparedness to prevent any asymmetry which prompts a re-evaluation among conflicting parties and prompts escalation. In other words, the argument is that conventional deterrence must underpin nuclear deterrence in order to diminish the prospect of nuclear use.

Neil Joeck's scepticism about the prospects of strategic stability in South Asia is in marked contrast to Ashley Tellis' forecast of a period (10 years or more) of 'ugly stability'. The term 'ugly' is used to convey the pattern of continuous low intensity conflict which prevails in Kashmir. The principal finding of continuing stability in South Asia is explained by a variety of reasons, but at the outset a few comments are in place. Unlike Neil Joeck's monograph, which concentrated its research energies on the question of 'nuclear stability' in South Asia, this volume deals with nuclear stability as part of the broader matrix of emerging political equations in the region as well as in 'Greater Asia', which includes China.

The author's endorsement of short term regional stability in South Asia is based on an appreciation of the political objectives of India and Pakistan in the region and an unwillingness to secure these objectives through a full-fledged conventional war. India, the author argues, seeks a larger psychological goal of great power status within the Greater Asia region (Which included China). Pakistan in marked contrast seeks to resist any such move which it interprets as affirming the Indian quest for great power status in the region and the world. Militarily, Tellis recognises

India's security objectives as primarily those of deterring China and prevailing over Pakistan in case of a conventional conflict. Pakistan's military objectives are directed at retaining its territorial integrity and attempting to secure the 'disputed' territory in Kashmir.

Despite these political and military objectives, India and Pakistan are unlikely to get into a conventional war in the next decade, primarily because the costs of war to achieve these political and military objectives make war an undesirable instrument for a resolution of the disputes between the two states. Tellis distinguishes between different war objectives and the implications these hold for the region. A war of unlimited aims (which is aimed at the total destruction of a conflicting state) is improbable because India does not have the political incentives to go in for such a war, while Pakistan does not possess the wherewithal to undertake such an exercise. Similarly, Tellis argues that a war of limited aims is also unlikely because of a 'structural' inability of both India and Pakistan to control the duration of war. Therefore, the only form of conflict which is likely to persist in the region is one of low intensity conflict of the kind witnessed in Kashmir.

The author further anticipates a conflict between the aspirations of India and China for great power status and envisages future Sino-Indian conflict as a result. This is premised on the pace and success of India's economic reforms. However, the success of such a move could be offset, in the author's view, by a potential rise in Indo-Pak tensions as a result of revisionism in foreign policy goals in the Greater Asia region.

The correlation of nuclear weapons with stability in the subcontinent, in Tellis's consideration, is much more 'ambiguous' than is commonly stated. It is important to recognise that both authors affirm that nuclear deterrence is not an automatic system which falls in place. A careful re-consideration of the size of arsenals, command and control mechanisms, intelligence and warning systems, the articulation of nuclear doctrine and confidence building measures (CBMs) would be crucial to the nuclear stability of the region.

Both monographs represent preliminary efforts to map the transition from a state of non-weaponised deterrence to a position of weaponised deterrence and a prognosis of what this entails for the region. There are a series of complex issues involving the actual practice of deterrence and there is quite clearly no infallible correlation between deterrence and stability. This remains as true of South Asia as of the practice of deterrence by the other declared nuclear weapons states. These works serve as a useful reminder of the

paradigmatic shift which occurred in the nuclear history of South Asia in May 1998, and underline the need to concentrate our collective energies on how best to minimize nuclear risk and avoid situations of unacceptable damage.

M. Siddharth

**THE FATE OF THE EARTH** by Jonathan Schell.  
Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1982.

LIKE mumps and love, nuclear arms protest has become something that everyone influenced by the western ethos has to get once. It's a part of growing up, involving the cathartic rituals of demonstrations, banner waving and slogans. You get it out of your system and then get on with the more serious things of life. Of course, there are some who never seem to get over this phase, who keep harping on the dangers of nuclear conflict and the urgent need for disarmament, much to the embarrassment, irritation and eventual boredom of those around them. Such persons are generally considered cranks, rather like vegetarians, religious fanatics or people who write for a living. There is something unreal about them.

And the reality is that of course the Bomb is there, part of the backdrop of daily routine, a fact of life like inflation, income tax and the high cost of fuel, and any sharp stab of terror it once might have evoked has long dulled to the mild, reassuring ache of an old wound. Through repetition, the warnings and statistics have become meaningless incantations; nuclear war could end the world; there is the equivalent of three tons of TNT for every human being on this planet; the hands of the Doomsday Clock are only minutes away from midnight. So what else is new? In this epidemic of acedia the spirit of Dr Strangelove, manic archetype of mega-suicide, ranges unfettered in a world grown familiar with the tribal lore of 'nukes', 'overkill', 'the balance of terror' and MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction).

Schell's book is a brilliant, impassioned attempt to exorcise this blind demiurge of self-destruction that seems to have possessed us. The book is something of a phenomenon. It has become an overnight international bestseller, an apocalyptic Bible for a new generation of pacifists. Hailed as a modern-day messiah by his followers, denounced by detractors in the nuclear establishment as a dangerously woolly-headed idealist, the 39 year-old staff writer for *The New Yorker*

\* Reprinted from *The Sunday Observer*, 21-28 August 1982 with permission from the author.

magazine, in which his book first appeared as a serial, has become the central figure of a cult and a controversy.

The extent and intensity of the public chain-reaction is intriguing. Since the first atom bomb was exploded 37 years ago, many critics including Einstein and Bertrand Russell, have questioned the wisdom of unleashing the awesome power that lies trapped in the heart of matter and have warned against the catastrophic consequences that may result from nuclear confrontation. But in the context of the nuclear issue, no scientist or philosopher, no matter how eminent, has had the same impact as Schell. Part of this might be explained by the fact that public consciousness of living on an endangered planet has been heightened by, among other things, the ecological movement, religious and spiritual revivalism and the space programme which has given us, for the first time in history, a view of our common earth as an exquisite, vulnerable entity against the vast indifference of the cosmos.

Moreover, Schell's comparative youth not only makes it easier for him to communicate with readers born and brought up under the shadow of the mushroom cloud but also lends his work the tone of an intensely personal testimony of what it means to have always lived on the edge of the abyss. Though he has spent years researching his material, he is no scientific *eminence grise* surrounded by an aura of asepsis. Nor is he a wild-eyed prophet crying in a self-created wilderness of confused thinking and self-indulgent emotionalism. He is a person in our midst, a deeply thoughtful, profoundly concerned individual, aware that at any time not only could the world as we know it come to an end but that, in the ultimate non-event which nullifies all events and everything else, both past and future, the human race could vanish into extinction.

In the first part of the book 'A Republic Of Insects And Grass', Schell argues that with the invention of nuclear weapons, war has become obsolete since warfare has always been a means to achieve certain ends and in the event of a nuclear holocaust any and all desired goals for which conflict could be engaged in would be destroyed. In sketching a possible scenario for doomsday, he begins with a graphic description of what happened when a 12.5 kiloton fission bomb ('a merely tactical weapon' by today's standards) was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 and which transformed 'a city of some 340,000 people into hell in a space of a few seconds.' The blast wave, the fires created by the thermal pulse, the deadly 'black rain' or the mushroom cloud and the radioactive fallout took

a toll of 130,000 people who were killed instantly or died within the next three months. Schell quotes eye-witness reports to evoke a nightmare or surreal horror; a child with a head like 'a boiled octopus', a girl of three trying to get her dead mother to drink water, a naked man holding his eyeball in his hand. Added to the physical destruction, was the psychic devastation of the survivors who had literally witnessed civilization disappear in a flash and who were left the legacy of unspeakable horror and the prospect of watching their future generations maimed and killed by radioactivity related diseases.

But 'what happened at Hiroshima was less than a millionth part of a holocaust at present levels of world nuclear armament.' Schell estimates that between them the two superpowers, America and the USSR, have a total of some 28,500 megatons of explosive power. This amounts to the equivalent of some 2,000,000 bombs of the type used on Hiroshima. Experts agree that this is more than sufficient not just to wipe out all human existence but to so disturb the entire ecosystem of the planet that gradually all life is wiped out and our world becomes, for all time to come, a sterile rock capable of sustaining nothing.

Schell argues that the oft-repeated thesis of a 'tactical' or 'limited nuclear war' is untenable for once the first strike takes place all barriers of restraint and reason would be shattered. He describes the probable effects of the dropping of a one megaton and 20 megaton bomb on New York City. 'If a 20 megaton bomb were air-burst over the Empire State Building at an altitude, the blast wave would (be)... 450 square miles... the zone of heavy damage... would be 1450 square miles.... The fireball would be about 4.5 miles in diameter.... People caught in the open 23 miles from ground zero... would be burned to death.... People hundreds of miles away who looked at the burst would be temporarily blinded and risk permanent eye injury.... The mushroom cloud would be 70 miles in diameter. New York city and its suburbs would be transformed into a lifeless, flat, scorched desert in a few seconds.'

After a while the cadences of this macabre poetry of annihilation become hypnotic, a chillingly apt metaphor for the deadly predicament they represent. Schell quotes an authority to prognosticate the effects on the USA of a strike of 10,000 megaton missiles, a conservative estimate for a pre-emptive strike. Blazing light would 'illumine large areas of the country as thousands of suns, each one brighter than the sun itself, blossomed over cities, suburbs and towns....

Tens of millions of people would go up in smoke. In 10 seconds the physical plan of the United States would be swept away like leaves in a gust of wind. The 600,000 square miles already scorched by the 40 or more calories of heat per centimetre square would be hit by blast waves of a minimum of 5 pounds per square inch, and... substantially the whole human construct in the United States... would be vaporized, blasted, or otherwise pulverized out of existence.' America would be eliminated 'not merely as a political entity but as a biological one', as radioactivity polluted the environment and the ozone layer in the northern hemisphere was depleted by 70 per cent, thus allowing lethal levels of ultraviolet radiation to scorch into extinction all but the most primitive forms of life, represented by insects and grass. In the global madness resulting, other nuclear countries would be likely to be drawn into a conflagration that consumed the world.

Of course the holocaust *may* not occur. But using an inversion of the Pascalian wager regarding the existence of God (if He doesn't exist, the one who wagers loses nothing, if He does exist one has an infinity to gain), Schell argues that considering the stakes, the absolute, irreversible eternity of loss, we, the living, have no moral right to gamble with even the remotest possibility of extinction which he calls 'the second death'. This is the most challenging part of the book and the core of Schell's thesis. In developing his philosophical and psychological argument, he ranges from St. Augustine to Kant, from Kafka to Freud. It is a courageous attempt to think of the 'unthinkable'. The inevitability of individual death is tempered by the consideration that though we must die, what Hannah Arendt called 'the common world' which we share with both past and future generations in a continuum, which gives measure, meaning and direction to human existence and redeems mortality from despair, lives on. We are inheritors of the past and trustees of the future. Extinction cancels past, present and future.

But who will suffer extinction? Not those who were living, for they would be dead. Not the unborn, for they would not be there. Extinction is like a Damocles sword hanging over an empty space. Even that is wrong, for in the emptiness of extinction there can be no metaphor to cast a shadow. We cannot even think of extinction as total emptiness, as emptiness connotes an absence and in extinction there can be no absence since there is no presence. In the face of extinction all categories of thought and feeling are nullified. 'It thus seems to be the nature of extinction to repel emotion and starve thought, and the mind...

descends into a kind of exhaustion and dejection,' says Schell and attributes public apathy to the nuclear peril to this enervation.

The closest we can come to an understanding of extinction is through the historical experience of genocide in which an entire race is sought to be exterminated. Analysing the aftermath of the Jewish Holocaust, Schell shows how it is only through bearing witness to the millions who died that the survivors of the death camps can hope to not only redeem their fact but also to reclaim their own human values which the machine of mass murder had attempted to destroy. Similarly, it is our failure to bear sufficient witness to future generations that has eroded our ethical norms and blurred our aesthetic perspectives: Lacking belief in a future which will justify our ideas and ideals, art becomes a purveying of transient fads and love is reduced to a spasm of momentary gratification. As our 'common world' withers, 'we grow indifferent to one another. We drift apart. We grow cold. We drowse our way to the end of the world...'

In the last, most controversial part of the book, Schell calls on the people, not political or military leaders or technocrats, but on ordinary, everyday people, everywhere, to shake off this suicidal torpor and work in concert towards the goal of salvation. Saying that it is neither 'radical' nor 'utopian' 'merely to want to go on living and to want one's descendants to be born,' he refutes the 'nuclear deterrence' theory, of mutual safety being born out of mutual terror, as being based on a fundamental logical subterfuge. In its simplest form, the theory is based on each power possessing a retaliatory capacity which in turn would prevent a first strike by its presence. Therefore, the sole stated purpose of nuclear arms is to prevent the use of nuclear arms.

But in the event of a first strike occurring in any case, due to a mistake, misunderstanding, technical failure or whatever, the retaliatory capacity, by definition, becomes useless. It can, of course, still be used out of motives of pure revenge. But such a revenge would end the human race and with it end all justifications and motives, including that of revenge. Being aware of this, could any leader sanely consider a retaliatory strike? Possibly or possibly not. But could not the possibility of the latter eventuality tempt an adventurist leadership into launching a first strike? The balance of terror, argues Schell, has the shape of a vicious circle.

In order to 'solve' the dilemma, various nuclear theorists have proposed strategies by which a first strike could be prevented by projecting an 'appearance of

irrational inexorable commitment', a 'rationality of irrationality', or even a 'doomsday machine' which would automatically blow the world up the moment a first strike was launched. Such, says Schell, is the 'logic' of the nuclear 'realists'.

But Schell's own suggested solution sounds at first no less incredible and preposterous. Nuclear disarmament, he feels, is not enough because though weapons can be dismantled, the knowledge of how to make them again cannot be and will always be a threat to the world. For the same reason, even total disarmament is not the answer. The only solution, according to Schell, lies in our realizing that man's usurpation of the power to destroy himself has rendered the concept of nationhood, for the sake of which all wars are waged, obsolete. He submits that unless we learn to view the world as an indivisible entity, both ecologically and politically, we may not have a world for very long. Beyond quoting Gandhi's gospel of love and non-violence and echoing Forster's slogan, 'Only connect!', Schell offers no prescriptions as to how this ideal remedy of a unified world is to be obtained. In a world riven by ideological, religious and racial conflict, deformed by appalling poverty on one hand and prodigal affluence on the other, Schell's panacea may smack of an innocuous nostrum not to be taken too seriously.

It could be argued that this is the most tenuous part of book. Yet, following the line of Schell's reasoning, there can be no other conclusion. For as he says, 'The alternative is to surrender ourselves to absolute and eternal darkness: a darkness in which no nation, no society, no ideology, no civilization will remain; in which never again will a child be born, in which never again will human beings appear on the earth, and there will be no one to remember that they ever did.'

The greatest strength of the book and, paradoxically, its hidden weakness, is Schell's passionate eloquence. His prose approaches a sombre lyricism which, for all its harrowing lucidity, seems to beguile the reader to the edge of the precipice it warns about. It is too early to tell whether the recent resurgence of nuclear arms protest in the west which has coincided with publication of this book, which in turn has helped inspire it, will take deeper, more purposeful root or, as in the past, it will subside as a seasonal disturbance, and whether it will be the fate of the earth that this remarkable work will become a fashionable conversational piece or, worse still, a prop for latter-day Hamlets intent on brooding on cosmic doom.

**Jug Suraiya**

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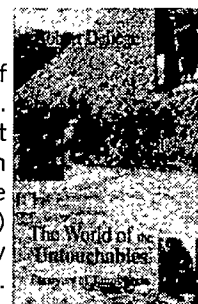
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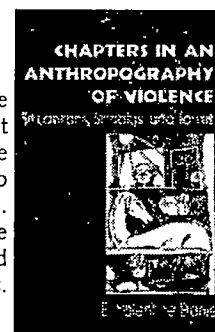


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# Communication

THE Medico Friend Circle (MFC) is an all India organisation of health professionals who have been actively involved in diverse issues of health over the last 25 years. At their mid-annual meeting in Sewagram they discussed the recent nuclear developments in India and Pakistan. They felt that the health aspects of these developments were as important as their political dimensions, but have hardly been debated in public. In protest against the nuclear tests in India and Pakistan, the MFC presents the following critique of the tests from a health perspective.

The nuclear explosions have violated our moral and ethical sense as health professionals. In all health systems the upholding of life is of highest professional value. Acts which threaten life are against the basic tenets of our profession. The exploding of nuclear bombs and efforts towards the development of weapons of mass annihilation are symbols of the most extreme violence by the state against people. We, therefore, oppose the nuclear explosions in principle and practice.

Is the bomb pro- or anti-health? We are living only 43 years after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Out of the combined populations of the two cities of six lakh, nearly two lakh died in the immediate aftermath of the bombings; children were born with increased birth defects; survivors continue to have increased rate of cancers; and genetic changes may be handed down for many generations to come.

In the last half century 305 nuclear accidents have already occurred, this alone resulting in 1871 cases of acute radiation syndrome and 101 deaths. Nuclear bomb testing (similar to those conducted by our two countries) in the Marshall Islands by the United States in 1954 resulted in thyroid tumours and cataracts.

The storage of nuclear weapons and the maintenance of nuclear preparedness has resulted in 50 such accidents, fortunately none of which have led to radiation fallout. It has been predicted that if a bomb of the intensity used at Pokhran were to be dropped on any major Indian city, it would result in between two and eight lakh deaths within a few days.

The nuclear explosions should be viewed in the light of previous disasters and the human suffering they caused. Obviously the worst possible health damage of being a non-nuclear nation is preferable to the possible hazards of developing, testing and stocking nuclear weapons, not to mention the likelihood of their use under grave provocation.

There is paucity of information about the health consequences of the use of nuclear technology in our country. The government maintains that no radiation was released above the surface of the ground during the nuclear explosions. But were there any studies to assess the health impact after the 1974 and the present explosions? What has been the effect on the underground ecosystems and to the water aquifers?

Even the peaceful use of nuclear power is surrounded by safety concerns and lack of

# In memoriam

## Nikhil Chakravarty 1913-1998

27 June 1998, a day after the twenty-third anniversary of one of the darkest days in the short history of our Republic, Nikhil Chakravarty was no more. He had been ailing for some time with a brain tumor. At 85, his fabled fighting spirit was somewhat tired.

It is routine to speak well of the dead, of how the nation has suffered an irreparable loss. But Nikhilda was unusual—in his unflinching opposition to the Emergency, in his eschewing of state awards, in his gentle, somewhat ironic commentary on the foibles of our political masters. Above all, he epitomised the rare quality of listening to even those he disagreed with, often vehemently.

Here was a one-time teacher, an erstwhile member of the Communist Party turned journalist who practiced his *swadharma* without deviation. In an era in which journalists play at being politicians, advocating favoured (if not partisan) causes, one suspects with an eye on the chair, Nikhil Chakravarty stuck to the straight and narrow. This when he, reportedly, had the ear of more politicians than any in the profession. He knew how to respect a confidence.

He invariably found time for the young, not so well-known, not only in the world of the media, but those active in a variety of causes. Democracy, transparent and accountable, was his abiding commitment, as was the need to surmount narrow nationalism. From the Editor's Guild, the Press Council, Nandia, to finally Prasar Bharati—his effort was to build up each of these institutions as countervailing centres to media hegemony.

The launching of *Mainstream* in 1962 is probably his most enduring legacy. As a small, independent journal, along with the *EPW*, and *Frontier* (and many others), it has striven hard to provide space to dissenting and analytical views—a space which, unfortunately, seems to be shrinking in mainstream media.

Finally, Nikhilda will be missed most, not just institutionally, but personally, as a friend. Warm, compassionate, patient, tolerant of our many weaknesses, and unswerving in the values he held dear. We at *Seminar* remember and salute his memory.

## POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

### Program Manager Population Program – New Delhi The John D. And Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

#### THE FOUNDATION:

The John D. And Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is a private, independent, grantmaking institution created in 1978. One of America's largest philanthropies, it has developed focused programs in selected areas where it believes that targeted philanthropic effort can make a distinctive contribution. Its headquarters are in Chicago, with small program offices in Palm Beach County, Florida, Russia, India, Nigeria, Mexico and Brazil.

Much of the Foundation's work is carried out through two programs, both of which were recently established by integrating several earlier programs:

- The Program on Human and Community Development supports research, policy analysis and advocacy and improvement of operating practice within the United States in three principal topical areas of focus: access to economic opportunity, child and youth development; and building community capacity. It also supports related grants in mental health policy and research.
- The Program on Global Security and Sustainability places priority on work which encourages peace within and among nations, responsible reproductive choices, a global ecosystem able to support healthy societies, and protection of human rights.

In addition, the Foundation supports the widely known MacArthur Fellows Program, as well as an active General Program which funds media-related grantmaking, and other special projects.

The Foundation is committed to an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach to its areas of interest, and promotes a collegial, team-oriented work style. It values creative, independent thinking and seeks to incorporate a diversity of viewpoints in its staff and its grantmaking.

#### THE POPULATION AREA:

The Population Area works to empower women and men to make informed choices about their reproductive choices and sexual health.

#### JOB SUMMARY:

The Population Program of the MacArthur Foundation, a U.S. based philanthropy, seeks a senior program manager based in New Delhi to coordinate grants to NCOs working on reproductive health in India.

#### RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Program and financial management;
- Represent the Foundation at meetings, conferences, forums;
- Review and analysis of project proposals;
- Grant negotiation;
- Monitoring and evaluation and;
- Writing reports

#### QUALIFICATIONS:

- Educational background in Social Sciences/social Work/Public health;
- Minimum ten years experience in the development field in India especially with a focus on women's issues and reproductive health
- Familiarity with the health and development networks and institutions across the country, grant negotiation, proposal development, program management, research, training, organizing meetings and workshops;
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information. Radioactive leaks have been reported from the Rajasthan atomic power station (RAPS). There has been anxiety about the exposure of nuclear plant personnel to excess radiation. And what about the environmental and biological consequences of dumping nuclear waste onto tribal land and into the sea? Nuclear waste from reactors continues to be radioactive for 20,000 years and if released into the environment has devastating consequences to the natural ecosystems and the food chains, remaining in the body for a lifetime. The present secrecy that surrounds our nuclear programme will be further legitimised in the interests of national security. The people of India have a right to be informed and to debate the hazards of nuclear technology both for peace and for war.

There is also the question of preparedness of the government and the medical community for a nuclear disaster? When the Chernobyl reactor exploded in the USSR in 1986, 350 plant workers were affected by acute radiation syndrome, 30 died and 1,35,000 people were evacuated from the area. Within hours the sick were transported to hospitals equipped to handle them, all the workers were decontaminated and within days 6000 medical personnel from all over the country arrived to perform evaluation and treatment of people. This kind of meticulous response probably averted a higher mortality. It is in this context that we must ask: What are the safeguards at our nuclear plants and weapon installations? What is the level of medical preparedness in the event of a nuclear disaster? The inept handling of the Bhopal gas tragedy, the plague epidemic in Surat and the recent typhoon in Gujarat raise grave doubts regarding our ability to cope with a greater kind of medical tragedy.

Do the goals of the government and the scientific establishment which developed the nuclear bomb reflect the needs and aspirations of the people in our country? Our country which is so proud of its achievement has still not addressed issues such as: One-fifth of our people go hungry every day; two-thirds of our children suffer from malnutrition; the commonest causes of death in our country are diarrhoea, malnutrition, respiratory infections, TB, and malaria. While becoming the sixth nuclear power, we still rank 138th on the human development index. The central health budget allocation for this year is only 10.2% of the defence budget. The entire health budget (Rs 3,700 crore) of the Union government for this year is less than the increase in

funding for defence. 'It is those who are not ashamed to be poor who are in need of the bomb.'

As health professionals and scientists today, are we being complicit in the use of science for narrow political ends? The present government is using the nuclear explosions to further its political agenda of creating a 'macho state'. The espousal of weapons of mass destruction by the government and the scientific community as a method of power, challenges the notion of 'value free science' or 'science for the public good.' We must remember that the scientific community provided the justification and the means for the horrors of the German concentration camps and the creation of a Nazi state. Are we being systematically involved in a similar project?

In the light of the health critique, the MFC makes the following demands of the government: (a) a commitment not to perform further nuclear testing; (b) a commitment never to use nuclear weapons; (c) a commitment to stop all further research and development of nuclear weapon systems; (d) to disseminate information to the public regarding:-

- \* the health hazards of nuclear testing, reactors, weapon systems and nuclear waste disposal
- \* the safeguards at nuclear installations to prevent such disasters
- \* the medical contingency plans in the event of a nuclear disaster
- \* the environmental consequences of nuclear testing and nuclear waste disposal.

The MFC would also like to state its commitment to regional peace through dialogue.

Our country's safety is a fundamental priority. But Gandhiji taught us to use non-violent means to obtain our freedom and security. Just 50 years later we are asked to rely on weapons of mass destruction to maintain that freedom.

What are the regional consequences? There is already an exacerbation of regional tensions and this appears to be only a sign of things to come. Will the bomb provide us with greater peace or higher levels of conflict and greater armament? While criticising India and Pakistan, we are against all nuclear weapons and the five nuclear states which continue to maintain their nuclear hegemony. We advocate global disarmament and maintenance of regional peace through dialogue and not through nuclear deterrence.

**Medico Friends Circle**  
Sewagram, Maharashtra

# Backpage

THE relationship between rulers and bards is an ancient one. Both *attract* each other; when insecure they *need* each other. It thus should have caused little surprise when the MHRD under the leadership of Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati, in a rare display of resolve, appointed 18 'historians' known for their ideological proclivities to the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR).

As in the case of the Pokhran explosions, the intentions of the BJP combine have been transparent. It has always held culture (including history) as central to its political imagination, as a resource for constructing its version of Indian nationalism. It has consistently opposed and refuted the claims of its secularist counterparts to a rational and scientific historiography.

But why bother about the ICHR, a crumbling, somewhat derelict body? We do need to remember that barring the UGC, the ICHR is the sole official agency to help promote historical research. And more than the miniscule funds and patronage that it doles out, inefficiently and increasingly irregularly, it seeks to confer the stamp of authenticity and legitimacy on the output it supports. It is this power of legitimacy, backed by the authority of the Indian state, over the reconstructions of our past and present that marks this move as significant. Dismissing it as mere jobbery, or as the 'normal' turnover in official positions which accompany a switch in ruling regimes, would be an error.

But, do we ever get a reasoned and informed debate, a genuine *samvad* about the official guardianship of our memory? Forget the lay citizen, is the professional historian genuinely concerned about and engaged with the functioning of institutions like the ICHR? It would appear not.

The charge today is not just that the ICHR has been packed with historians (many well past their prime) who support the saffron position on Ayodhya, some who were involved with the effort to withdraw the NCERT history textbooks in the seventies. It is also that the basic memorandum of the ICHR has been altered: the words 'rational' and 'scientific' being replaced by 'national'. Also that the statements of objectives in the memorandum have been reduced from five to two.

The charge, if true, is serious and merits investigation. Columnist Arun Shourie (*The Asian Age*, 3 July 1998) refutes it as fabrication. Quoting the Education Secretary, he claims that the memorandum, in its entirety, has remained unaltered since 1978. He also

cites specific ministry resolutions to this effect, with relevant file numbers and dates. One is entitled to ask why those who framed this charge, both in mainstream media and the academia, have so far been unable to prove to the contrary.

As important as the rational/scientific (secular) versus national (communal) debate about the writing of Indian history, is the issue related to its officialising. We are all aware that our reading/reconstruction of the past continuously changes, not only because of fresh evidence and advances in methodology, but because current concerns and fashions have a way of impinging on the writing of history. Successive generations imbue different weightages and values to different events, personalities and processes. Further, much of what passes for history is affected by what is supported, by whom, in what manner and to what ends. In short, history is always contested.

Nevertheless, disciplines do evolve their own norms of scholarship and integrity. Peer review is central to this process. This is why proximity to power, a hankering after official patronage, a conferring/seeking of official legitimacy does little to advance the cause of dissenting imaginations, of alternative truths.

It is indeed unfortunate that bodies like the ICHR have yet to be put through a public social audit, both financial and academic. In popular understanding, it is seen as captive to a certain cabal of historians who have utilized their differential access to an 'official' body to delegitimise others (both individuals and works) while promoting the favoured. There are frequent charges – not just of inefficiency, or nepotism, or corruption, but of presenting a view of our history.

Possibly, this is why those declaiming the current saffronisation and promotion of narrow (Hindu) nationalism carry limited credibility. It is not that their apprehensions are unfounded. The BJP as an insecure coalition is *more* likely to be *more* aggressive in promoting its favoured versions of our history. So we may well witness frequent disputes over Buddhist *jataka kathas* or the iconography of Sita, if not the upgrading/downgrading of different historical personalities. But, having permitted our national institutions to fall into decay, in not having evolved acceptable norms of evaluation, we are likely to once again be subjected to a narrow, partisan and unseemly debate. Not quite designed to serve History.

Harsh Sethi



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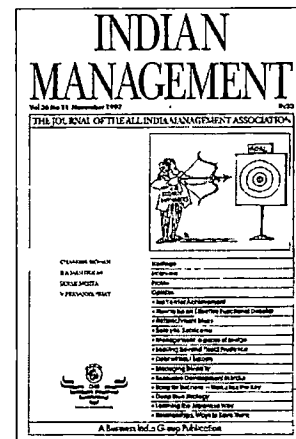
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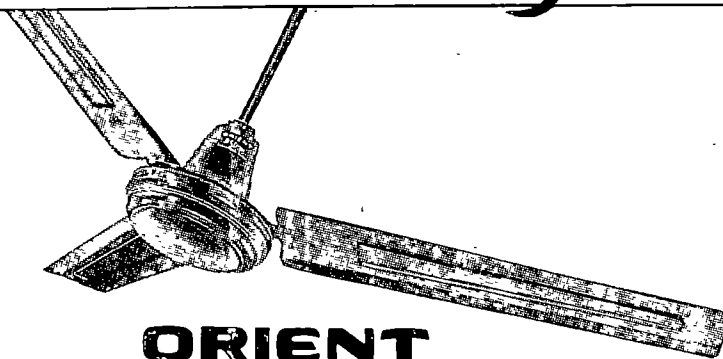
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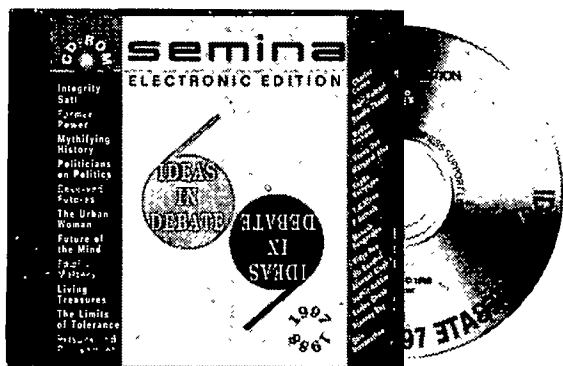


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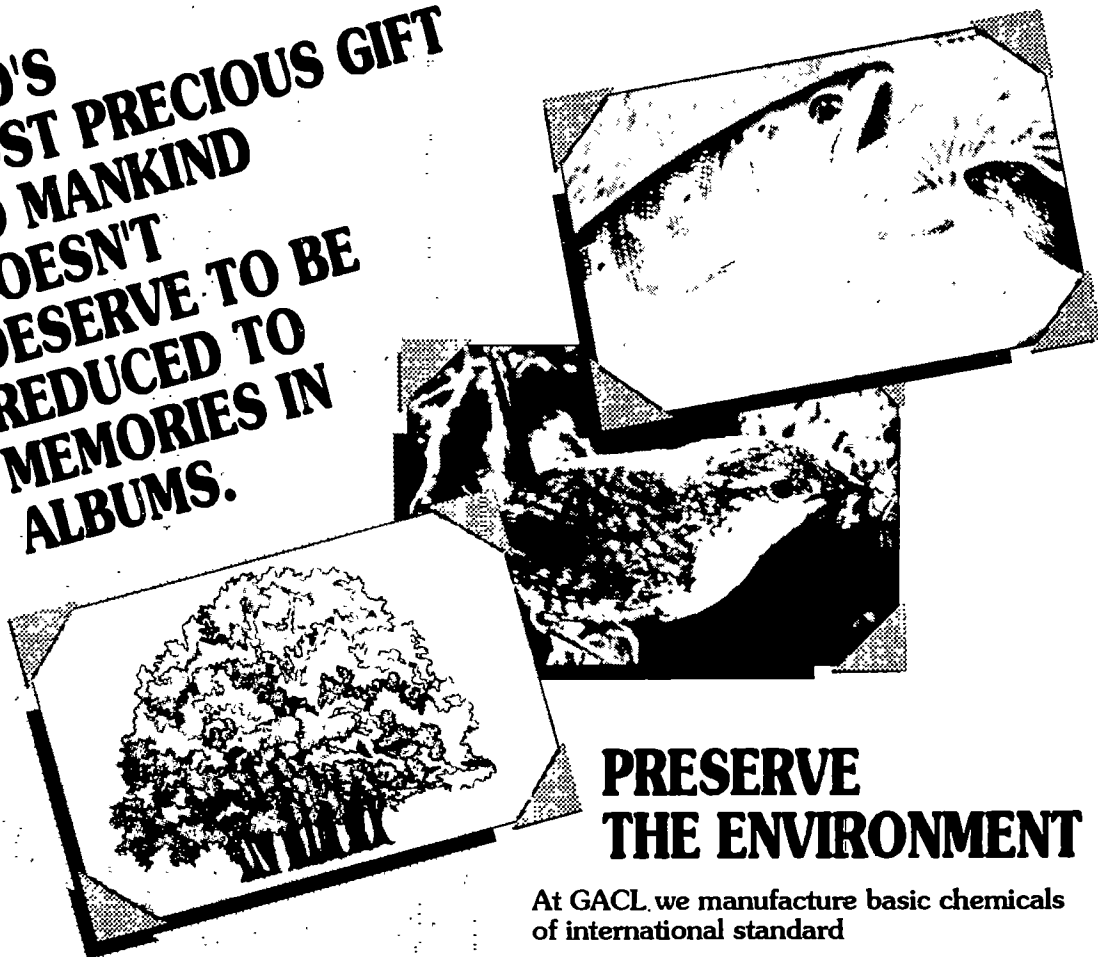
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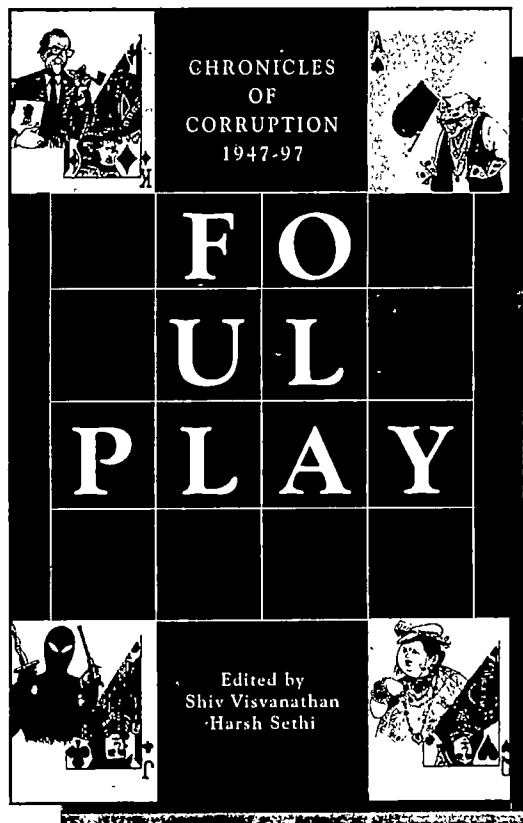
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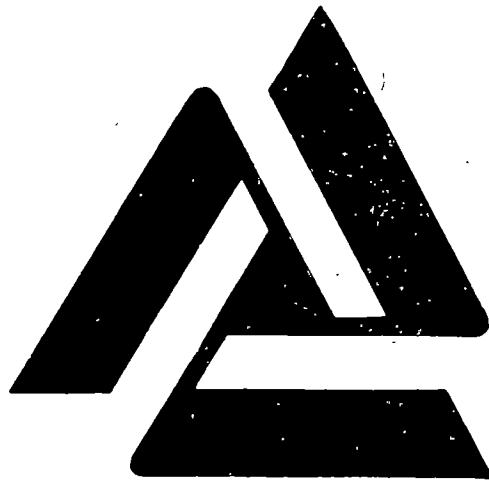
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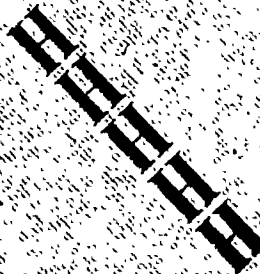
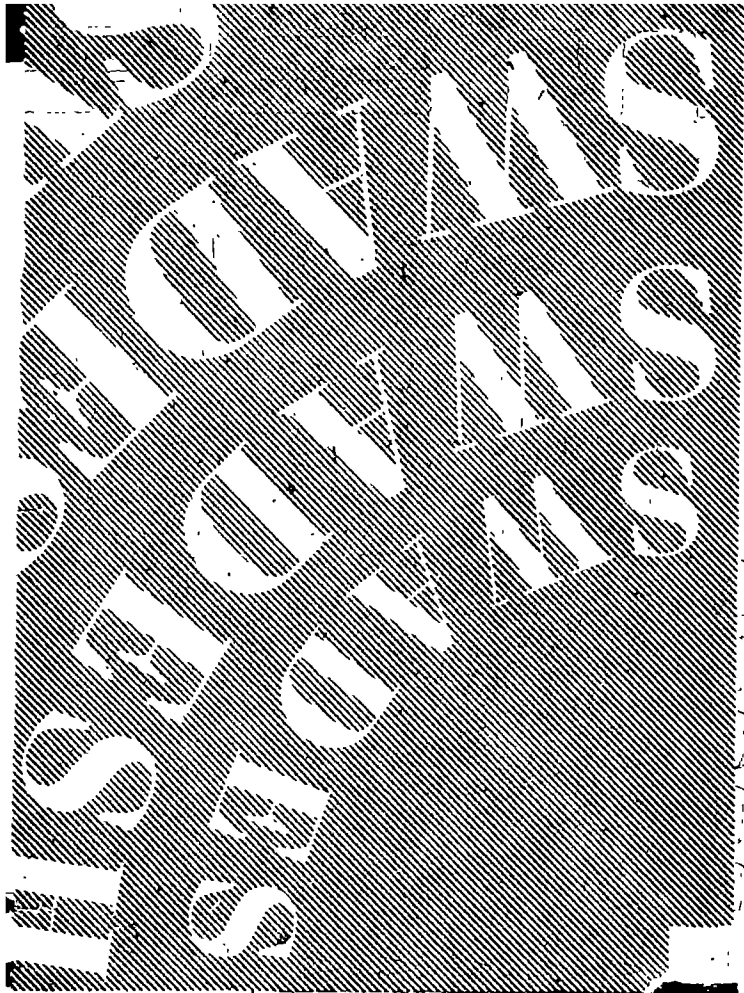
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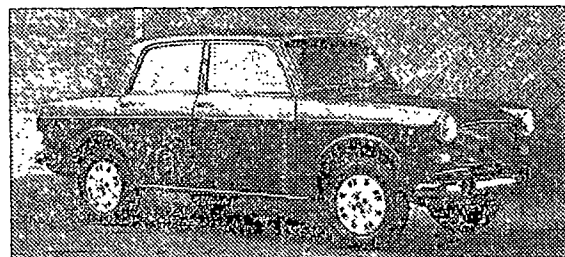
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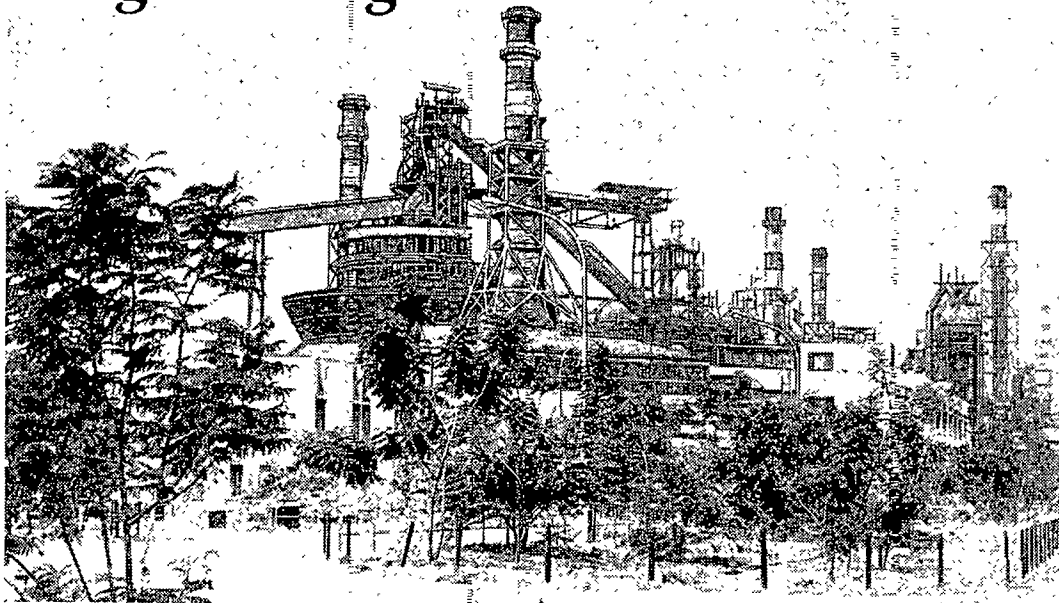
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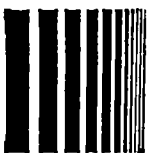
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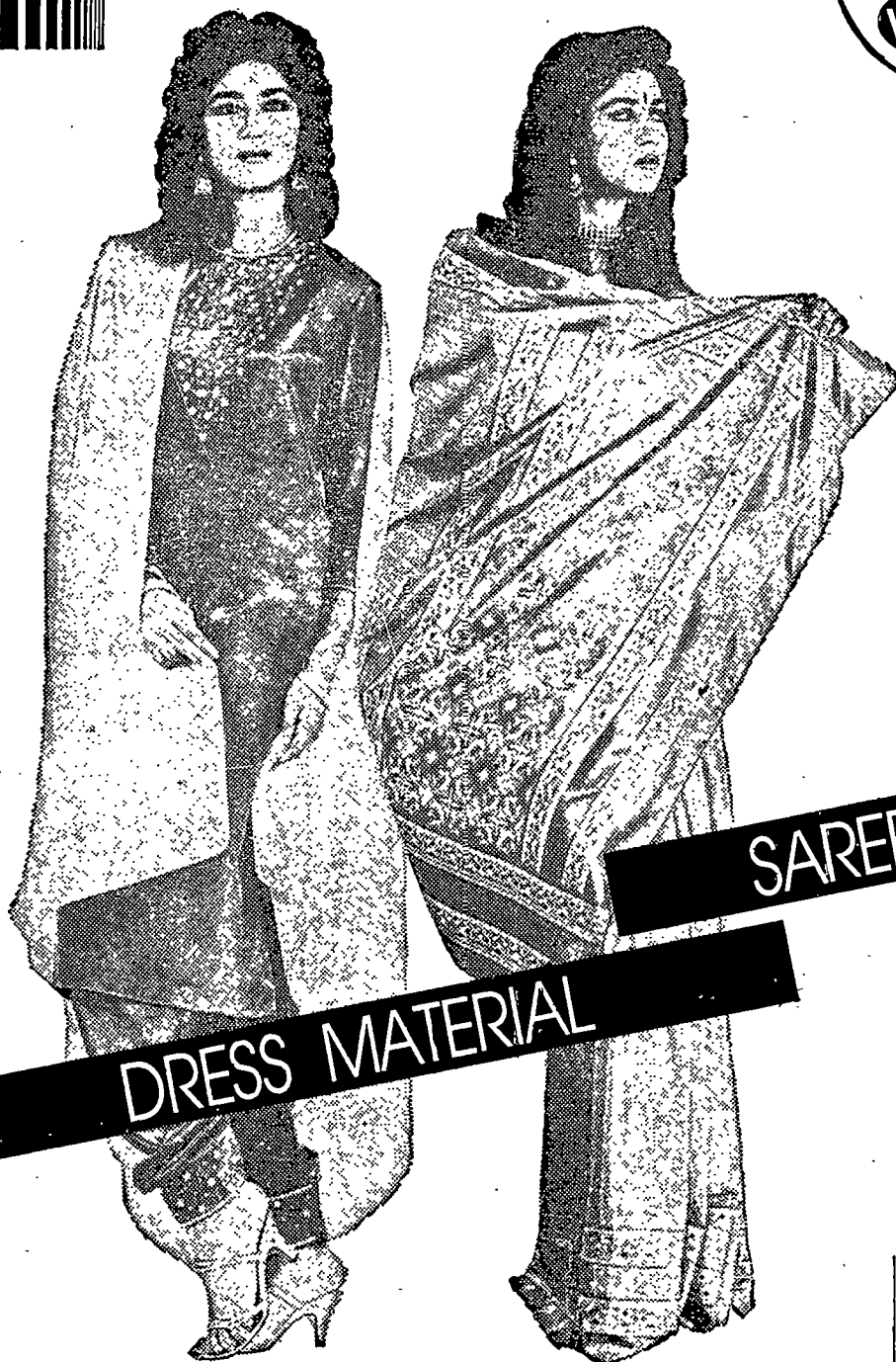
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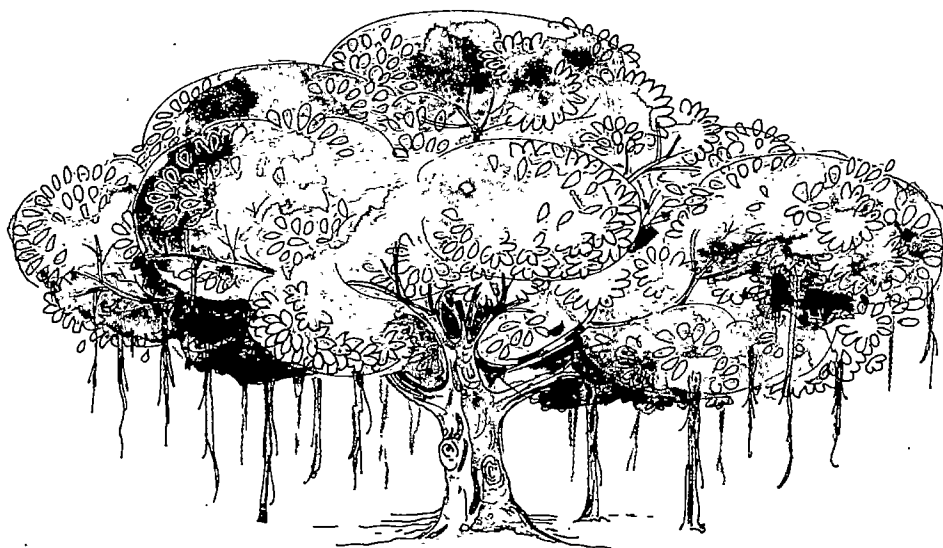
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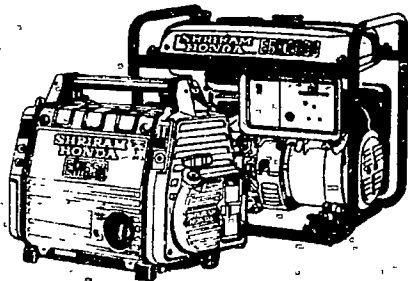
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## NEXT MONTH: GUJARAT

# 469

## SWADESHI

a symposium on

the current rethinking

on opening up the economy

symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
a short statement  
on the issues involved
- 15 **SWADESHI AND NATIONALISM**  
S. Gurumurthy, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Chennai
- 20 **SWADESHI OR SELF-RELIANCE?**  
Ashok Mitra, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha);  
former Finance Minister, Government of West Bengal
- 23 **ECONOMIC POLICY AS A BY-PRODUCT**  
Vinod Vyasulu, Consulting Economist and Secretary,  
Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore
- 28 **FOOD FREEDOM AND ECONOMIC FREEDOM**  
Vandana Shiva, Director, Research Foundation for  
Science, Technology and Ecology, Delhi
- 35 **TRUSTING OUR OWN GENIUS**  
V. Kurien, Chairman, National Dairy Development Board,  
Anand, Gujarat
- 38 **INTERVIEW**  
With Adi Godrej, industrialist, by Ashok Upadhyay,  
Executive Editor, 'Business India', Mumbai
- 40 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by Aditya Bhattacharjee, Alistair McMillan,  
Harsh Sethi and Makarand Paranjape
- 50 **EXTRACTS**  
From the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
- 52 **COMMUNICATION**  
Received from Ishtiaq Ahmed and others
- 54 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdhury  
of Dilip Chowdhury Associates

# The problem

'When memories die, a people die.'  
'But what if we make up false memories?'  
'That is worse,' replied the old man. 'that is murder.'

When Memories Die, A. Sivanandan, 1997

THESE are strange, somewhat troubled times. Words and phrases have a way of taking on new meanings, new resonances, which often have little in common with their heritage. Now that the official celebrations of the golden jubilee of our Independence are safely behind us, it is time we re-examine our tryst with destiny. What better way than to start with the keywords that informed our struggle for freedom.

From the Mahatma's *swadeshi* to the current ruling dispensation's invocation represents a long journey. Then, as now, a primary concern was the economy. In the early years of this century, we were concerned about the de-industrialisation of the country under British Raj, the unfair competition between the mills of Lancashire and the millions of our poor weavers. In a nation wracked by economic drain, our nascent bourgeoisie often turned to the political leaders for support.

Two of Gandhi's essays in *Young India* and *Harijan* make clear his position. He well understood that the Britisher was top-dog and the Indian the under-dog in his own country. Consequently, he questioned the notion of 'equality of rights' between a giant and a dwarf. 'Before one can think of equality between

unequals, the dwarf must be raised to the height of a giant.... The process may seem harsh but it is inevitable if the millions of the plains are to be the equals of the privileged few.'

But to read Gandhi's call for *swadeshi* as one of reverse racial discrimination, or even as a slogan of 'Be Indian, buy Indian' would be doing him great injustice. *Swadeshi* for him meant not just *svavalamban* and *arthic swaraj* but also a holding of British lives and honour as sacred as our own. As a positive process of both economic and societal regeneration it meant attacking our internal ills, our entrenched inequalities, as much as combating the inequitous colonial order. Above all, it had no place for rancour.

Or take Sri Aurobindo whose strategy to win *swaraj* was based on a doctrine of passive resistance as a political method to bring an end to British rule and act as a catalyst to Indian regeneration. Central to it was an understanding that all share in the struggle and suffering such that a nation could start with a fully developed unity and strength. Otherwise, he argued, we may well end up 'embracing liberty over a heap of corpses.'

He went further: 'To submit to illegal or violent methods of coercion, to accept outrage and hooliganism as part of the legal produce of the country is to be guilty of cowardice, and by dwarfing national manhood, to sin against the divinity within ourselves and the divinity in our motherland.'

Independent India's experimentation with swadeshi has gone through various phases, much of it involving versions of a command economy. The broad consensus of the early decades was a distrust of the market and private enterprise, a primary reliance on the home market (import substitution) with the state (read bureaucracy) in the driving seat. At no stage was there any attempt to educate and mobilise the masses. So, not only did our policies not enjoy popular sanction and participation, we evolved as a nation of supplicants, looking to the government as *mai-baap*. Expert opinions vary, but while the country did develop a diversified, modern production base, the system of planning simultaneously introduced serious distortions and helped entrench a permit-quota raj with its consequent corruption and delays.

Times change, so do fashions. The previous decade, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, seems to have ushered in a high noon for unbridled capitalism. As against the earlier faith in state planning and the home market, the pendulum has shifted to internal and external liberalisation, and globalisation. Foreign capital, technology and products have become the new yardsticks for assessing quality, competence and performance.

It is still too early to seriously assess the implications of this policy shift. What, however, does seem evident is that the opening up (and out) of the different sectors of the economy has created severe dislocations.

Linking up globally implies sharing both the upturns and downturns of the global market. Unfortunately, being minor players globally, we do not have the wherewithal to influence the rules of the game defined, for instance, by the World Trade Organisation with its new rules for governing intellectual property (TRIPS and TRIMS). And since markets habitually favour the better endowed, weaker parties, both globally and internally, tend to be worse off, at least in the interim.

Some of the above is clearly a consequence of the timing and mode of our dalliance with globalisation. The timing was not of our choosing, events being dictated by a severe crisis in our external accounts. Nor, unfortunately, was the mode – the speed, the extent, the sequencing – by which our authorities sought to privatise and regulate our entry into the global market.

As we now approach the close of the decade, the economy is caught in a severe recession, not helped by the global downturn, the meltdown of the South East Asian economies and an increasing volatility in currency markets. Worse, the profligacy of our past policies, with its excessive reliance on meeting the consumption demands of the upwardly mobile middle classes without requisite investments in infrastructure and skill development, has severely handicapped the economy in its efforts at restructuring. Alongside is the fragility of our polity, our systems of governance, our rules and regulations – the breakdown of which is

contributing to a climate of fear and insecurity and a release of atavistic passions.

The new call for *swadeshi* by the ruling coalition has to be located in this new and changed environment. As indicated earlier, the slogan now resonates differently. Is this a call against a hasty and ill-planned integration into the global market? Is it a demand for protection against unfair foreign competition? Or is it, as many fear, merely a seeking of higher privileges in the home market so that inefficient producers with the correct political connections can continue to palm off substandard goods and services by restricting choices for the consumer.

No one today seriously believes that we can go back to the days of centralised planning, with bureaucrats and technocrats calling the shots. Equally, as Gandhi had aptly remarked, we cannot talk of equality between the giant and the dwarf. So what does *swadeshi* now imply?

For Coomaraswamy, *swadeshi* meant much more than making India self-contained and self-reliant, especially in respect of industry and manufactures. It meant doing without things which are not worth having. 'Civilization consists, not in multiplying our desires and the means of gratifying them, but in the refinement of their quality. ... A nation which sees its goal rather in the production of things than in the lives of men must perish.'

He further argued against the notion of *swadeshi* as self-sacrifice. 'It is never worth while in the long run putting up with the second best.' 'Not till the Indian people patronise Indian arts and industries from a real appreciation of them, and because they recognise them not merely as cheaper but as better than the foreign, will the *swadeshi* movement become complete and comprehensive.'

It is unfortunate that without a grounding in a larger philosophical and societal vision, the debate on *swadeshi* has been hegemonised by economists and businessmen, polarised between the pro and anti liberalisers and globalisers. There is little concern about how our resource poor and relatively unskilled citizens can survive and improve their life chances in a competitive marketplace without adequate safeguards and support from the state. More disturbing is the veritable absence of a political strategy, any discussion of the instrumentalities, the organisations through which the competing visions hope to mobilise support.

It is with some difficulty that the country was able to make a dent in the earlier economic orthodoxy. Hesitant and half-hearted, we did embark on a process of

redefining rules and regulations in an effort to reduce the power of the *babus* and unshackle the creativity of the producing classes. Possibly, this might not have happened in the absence of an external impetus. The fear is that with a continuation of the current recession as more enterprises go under, adding to the woes of high unemployment and inflation—a call for *swadeshi* could turn xenophobic.

Some have argued the need to go beyond the false polarities of the state and market or the domestic and foreign. This view, currently on the margins, seeks to question the very model of modern development as inherently inequitable and unsustainable. It would rather locate itself in base communities, relying not only on their own material resources but indigenous knowledge systems, in an effort to rework the discourse on progress.

Insecure nations and societies have a way of turning inwards. We have seen this with the practice of our secularism, the main beneficiary of which has been *Hindutva*. Practising *swadeshi* and *svavalamban* demands a measure of self-confidence. All too easily this can lapse into pride and self-glorification which, particularly if the present is dismal, can locate itself into the past. Accompanying this is a search for enemies, both external and internal. In addition to a Cargill or a Coca-Cola, the frustrated also target all those who challenge the current dispensation, or demand their rights. This today may appear a far cry but there are shades of national socialism in many of our nationalistic and anti-foreigner outbursts.

Tagore, incidentally, was a critic of the middle class dissatisfaction with 'insufficient nationalism'. His version of patriotism not only rejected the violence propagated by terrorists and revolutionaries, it equally rejected the concept of a single ethnic Hindu *rashtra* as anti-Indian, even anti-Hindu. While writing with great sensitivity about the nation as a suffering mother, he dismissed the idea of the nation state as being the main actor in Indian political life. More than a foregrounding of India's civilizational categories or their facile synthesis with the values of Enlightenment, he pleaded for an awareness of the global politics of cultures.

The need today is to resuscitate a positive, an inclusive, a generous *swadeshi*. To build and renew confidence in our abilities and skills in our people and knowledge systems. Above all, to be willing to learn, to change and adapt, to keep our doors and windows open and not be swept off our feet. That is *swadeshi*. This issue of *Seminar* seeks to debate these concerns.



# Swadeshi and nationalism

S. GURUMURTHY

EVEN five years back, the idea of *swadeshi* was considered outdated. To the economist it was anti-economics, to the intellectual it was anti-modern, to the industrialist it was anti-technology, to the media it was amusement, to the policy-maker it was socialism in disguise, and to the politician it was an embarrassment. The combined calumny of all these powerful groups created deep prejudice against the idea of *swadeshi* in India and outside.

But now the *swadeshi* view has overcome all unfair attempts to label it as irrelevant and harmful to India. Today many intellectuals admit that *swadeshi* is not such an inelegant idea after all. Many define it as an 'India-first' approach, like the 'America-first' approach in USA, for they need a foreign lead to define *swadeshi*. Many industrialists agree on *swadeshi* as the idea of strengthening Indian industry and creating Indian multinationals. Even the media and commentators are not as hostile to the idea of *swadeshi* as they were and have begun to view it more seriously. Many political parties and leaders openly support the *swadeshi* viewpoint. The media now talks of *swadeshi* shares as distinct from MNC shares in the stock market. The takeover of various corporates by

MNCs is not just regarded as anti-*swadeshi*, but also against national interests. So the idea of *swadeshi*, interpreted by everyone in their own light, is now very much in the Indian mind.

What is it that turned the Indian mind towards *swadeshi* when just five years ago it had virtually been consigned to the dustbin of history. Before tracing how *swadeshi* began to reassert itself in India, it is necessary to recapitulate how socialism forced its way into the Indian polity, and what it meant in contrast to present day market capitalism.

When at the beginning of this decade the Berlin Wall collapsed and the Soviet Union disintegrated, virtually the entire world defected from socialism to capitalism. The premise was that if socialism failed, capitalism must succeed. During the Cold War, the operating principle was that capitalism and socialism were competing ideologies. In truth, they were two sides of the same coin.

Both view human beings as purely economic creatures and are based on the abrahamanic worldview that the world is secular and materialist, that there is nothing sacred about anything. Both agree that men and women pursue, in the main, economic

prosperity and nothing else; both rule out the existence of God except as the personal view of the believer. Both regard human beings as essentially atomised individuals and do not recognise any natural, cultural and social human collectivities having common faiths, ideals, goals, or way of life. Capitalism believes in sharing the burden of the state with the market, and trusts the market more than it believes in the state as the delivery mechanism. But socialism does not believe in the market and believes only in the state. This is the sole difference. Thus, capitalism and socialism are the same content in two different containers. And yet the world for almost the whole of the 20th century believed that they represented conflicting ideologies.

**T**his was why Mahatma Gandhi told Pandit Nehru that although the latter believed that the capitalist system was the cause for the ills of industrialisation, the truth was that the fault lay in industrialism and no amount of socialisation would cure its ills. The dialogue between Gandhi and Nehru on industrialism, socialism and capitalism dates back to 1928.

Pandit Nehru first wrote an angry letter to the Mahatma accusing him of exaggerating the faults of western industrial civilisation, and belittling its achievements. Nehru also told the Mahatma that the idea of *Ramrajya* was no good in the past, nor would he want it back. He was blunt that whether one liked it or not, western civilisation would gradually overtake India. The Mahatma, stunned by Nehru's angry outburst, wanted to make public the differences between the two, saying that he never imagined that the differences between him and Nehru were so unbridgeable. He also advised Nehru to carry on open warfare with him, because if he (Gandhi) was wrong,

he was causing irreparable harm to national interest. But, Nehru successfully avoided the debate.

Once again, 17 years later, in 1945, Nehru ridiculed the Mahatma for his ideas on *gramswaraj* and *swadeshi*. Here too Gandhi suggested an open debate, but Nehru avoided the dialogue remarking that the elected representatives of independent India would discuss and decide the direction in which the country should move. So the all-important debate between the mentor (Gandhi) and the disciple (Nehru) never took place.

**N**either did the dialogue, which Pandit Nehru had promised to the Mahatma that the elected representatives of independent India would carry on take place. There was no debate at the national level about whether the ideas of *swadeshi*, *swavalamban* and *gramswaraj* articulated by the Mahatma were outdated and irrelevant. There was no discussion on whether India should pursue the free market motto if it discarded the *swadeshi* view or the socialist model, and whether socialist philosophy would suit the Indian psyche. The leadership adopted socialism without a debate, without understanding what it entailed and what changes and adjustments it would impose on our society, polity, ethos and religion.

We assumed that purely through the political process, that too in a democratic polity, we could remould the society to abandon its age-old traditions, beliefs and lifestyle and switch over to socialism. The result was a dual life – a formal modern life as the veneer and the age-old beliefs as the core. The traditional views and lifestyle were pushed underground – seen as illegitimate within the political, economic and modern social intercourse. Alongside, we relegated religion to the sidelines, except

to the extent that the system allowed the minority religion and culture to define our new notions of secularism.

This led to a further duality – while paying lip service to socialism for votes, we institutionalised the permit, quota, licence raj in the name of a mixed economy. This promoted corruption and black money and caused serious erosion of national character. Yet, the society remained where it always was and refused to change, but the polity put on a cloak of socialism. The deterioration reached its nadir when Indira Gandhi virtually turned socialism into theatre. She even labelled those who opposed the dishonesty that went on in the name of socialism as anti-poor, pro-rich, even as American and CIA agents. She grafted the slogan of socialism on the Constitution, pressured the Supreme Court into accepting socialism as a constitutional creed to which the rest of the Constitution was subordinate. Thus, phoney socialism became legitimate politics.

**W**hile the socialist reign was a general disaster, in specific terms it damaged the economic potential of the country. Indian enterprise and entrepreneurship had dominated world trade before the advent of the British; it had dominated the trade in East Asia and Africa even after the British left India.

Before the British established their rule in 1830, India's share of the world's production was 19%, that of Britain 9% and of USA 2%; its share in world trade was 18%, that of Britain 8% and of USA 1%. India had higher literacy than Europe. It is colonial rule that eroded our economic base. When the British left, our share of world production and trade was less than 1%. The British demolished the business competence, initiative and self-confidence of Indians; the demo-

lition work continued more efficiently under the socialist regime in India.

The Indian trading communities turned into clerks while the skilled self-employed became unskilled employees, or turned unskilled and unemployed. A country which worshipped money (Lakshmi) as god was persuaded to treat money makers as untouchables. A nation which had a tradition of treating work as worship and which actually worshipped the tools of trade was organised and trained to destroy all work ethic. The public sector was indiscriminately encouraged with the resulting inefficiency concealed by ideological sloganeering. The installation of a socialist regime was collaterally assisted by the godless idea of secularism. Socialism and secularism alienated the Indian state from Indian beliefs, tradition and values.

**T**he Indian state abhorred talented traders as blood-sucking middlemen, acute financiers and bankers as exploiters and accumulators of wealth and power, and astute industrialists as monopolists and profiteers. In fact, Indian businessmen were treated as undesirables, even as untouchables. The socialist regime perpetuated a mindset in which the best minds of India found it advantageous to seek employment rather than turn employers to provide employment.

In the first two decades after freedom, some of the best minds in the country entered government service instead of setting up business or joining professions that could create wealth and employment; some of them even made business out of the government. That is not all. Socialism made public life government-centric and politics oriented. This disproportionate role for state and politics without any norms to recognise quality and merit, generated a rush into politics for

recognition and power. As the society weakened against politics and money, it gradually turned politics into a profitable industry.

Ordinary people as well as the informed ones, whether in towns or villages, were made to believe that it was the state, not society or community, which would deliver. The result was the falling into disuse of all traditional delivery mechanisms like village communities and social and religious institutions. The ensuing public discourse served to move people away from God and even from the very idea of nationalism. The result was an India which was an antithesis of all that the movement for our freedom had envisioned.

If the freedom movement was inspired by the idea of spiritual nationalism as expounded by Swami Vivekananda, motivated by *Sanatana Dharma* held out by Aurobindo as our nationalism, fertilised by the enchanting *Vande Mataram* of Bankim Chandra, and defined by the ideal of *Ramrajya* as enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi, free India's secular and socialist mix declared every one of these noble and sustaining ideas as irrelevant, unsecular and communal.

**I**t was then that two path-breaking developments took place in the post 1980 years. The Ayodhya movement called the bluff of pseudo-secularism while the collapse of the communist states exposed the socialist rhetoric in India as nothing more than a shadow of the Soviet brand of socialism. This resulted in a massive generation of national self-assertion. The Ayodhya movement restored the pre independence values eclipsed by the secular socialist regime, and illegitimised pseudo-secular ideas and practices.

With its collapse in Berlin and Moscow, socialism became a dead letter in the Indian polity, notwithstan-

ding the false undertaking given by all political parties to the Election Commission regarding socialism. Overnight, the entire intellectual establishment, including bureaucrats and columnists defected to market capitalism. Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh dismantled the entire socialist edifice in pin-drop silence. There was not a word of protest—in the Congress or in the CPM or CPI, the Revolutionary Socialist Party or the different Samajwadi parties. The entire nation witnessed and even rejoiced in the way socialism ceased to figure in the resolutions of political parties and in their election speeches.

**W**hen the exponents of socialism abandoned their pet ideology, they swung to the other extreme—they became as ardent and faithful exponents of liberalisation and globalisation as they had been about socialism. They supported every move that dismantled the socialist establishment, even though many of the moves contributed to a dismantling of the Indian state itself.

Indian businessmen, the middle class and the intelligentsia turned so hostile to the socialist idea of the past that they viewed with suspicion any voice of moderation against the thoughtless way in which the entire national course was reversed. They saw every sane voice which advocated a gradual opening up of the Indian economy to global competition as a conspiracy to retain the socialist establishment.

The result was that just as socialism had become a fad, globalisation too became an ideological *mantra*. The socialism of the past legitimised globalisation for the future—without any thought as to what globalisation entailed, and the capacity of the nation to meet it. Anyone who differed regarding the pace or reach of globa-

lisation was branded as anti-modern and even anti-growth. There was no debate as to how, in what stages, in what areas and with what safeguards the change-over from a socialist regime to a free market economy would take place.

Just as our establishment adopted socialism instantly, without debate, and suffered for 40 years, equally instantly it has adopted market economy, again without debate. What it has not realised is that just as 40 years of socialism could not penetrate the Indian psyche defended by its age-old traditions, values and lifestyles, the free market prescription too cannot accomplish what socialism did not. But like an allopathic doctor who prescribes antibiotics as an instant cure for illness, instead of building up of resistance for a long term cure, the Indian establishment has prescribed free market globalisation as an instant cure for the ills of socialism.

**F**ree market globalisation which is presented as the cure today, will eventually prove to be a mere dose of antibiotics—a transitional treatment rather than a durable cure. This is what emerges from the India's experience—and that of the world—in the 1990s. If swadeshi, which was eclipsed by socialism for four decades and ridiculed by the globaliser brigade, is back as India discarded socialism—although with different meaning and implications for different sections—it means that the Indian establishment took less time to realise the mismatch between globalisation and India than it took to understand the unsuitability of socialist ideas for India.

The present trend to view swadeshi thinking as 'not so terrible' is indicative of the fact that the present day India is in transition and the idea of economic globalisation is a transitional flirtation, not a destination.

Why is globalisation a transitional flirtation? Not because the intellectuals and elites in India, inspired by an Anglo-Saxon worldview, and who direct the Indian mind in politics and economics, have the vision of a larger philosophic formulation. It is because Indian society's core values, which are not amenable to the Anglo-Saxon traditions, cannot internalise the idea of globalisation. Because the civilisational, cultural and traditional ideas and forces have a resistance which the state directed ideologies cannot overcome.

**R**emember that despite the unmitigated monstrosity of the communist regime in China which organised cultural revolutions to banish Confucian traditions, what emerged unscathed from the blackest period of Chinese history was the very same Confucian tradition. Akio Morita, a doyen of Japanese business, told Group 7 leaders when they met in Tokyo in 1992 that whatever the great political leaders might do to install a global regime, national, traditional and civilisational factors would thwart the so-called 'global system of trade'. The Anglo-Saxon worldview recognised no value other than its own as fit for survival. The basic justification behind the present effort at globalisation is that the West has finally won against the Rest and that the world is finally being restructured on the basis of western civilisational values. Globalisation assumes a world civilisation modelled after the western.

This is how the West first perceived the post-Cold War World. Francis Fukuyama in his work, *The End of History and the Last Man* declared that the collapse of communism meant that western civilisation had finally won and that world peace was guaranteed on that basis. But this view did not dominate the field for more than a

couple of years. Samuel Huntington, the strategic analyst, came out with his famous theory of 'clash of civilisations'. He forecast, not the final victory of the West over the Rest but a West-versus-the Rest scenario. He visualised the post-Cold War world driven by civilisational factors inspired by religion, not by economics or trade. He saw civilisational blocs evolving as trade and political blocs. He advised the West to come to terms with a world of different civilisations which have to live with each other, and not hope for a world civilisation based on the western to emerge.

Alwyn Toffler agreed that there would be civilisational clashes, not between civilisations defined by religion but among civilisations demarcated by economic criteria. He envisioned a civilisationally trisected world—premodern, modern, and postmodern—clashing with one another, in which he perceived the emergence of city states and the collapse of all nation states.

**Y**et another view, expounded by Lester Thurow, perceived the collapse of the family, community, morals and traditions, leading to the stagnation and decay of capitalism. Thus, the theoretical framework needed for a global regime in trade and politics does not seem to exist. Unless there is a broad theoretical framework in which a world regime can be accommodated, a functional world trade regime cannot be internalised. Therefore, the idea of globalisation fabricated by the West after the Cold War seems to suffer from a myopic vision and ignores the large gaps among nations not amenable to a world regime.

If theory refuses to legitimise a global regime, the functioning of the current global regime equally exposes its disfunctionality. The European monetary crisis, the Mexican crisis

and now the South East Asian crisis have rocked the basic assumptions of the global regime under installation. The greatest danger to the world trade regime – even if the people of the world forget their religious, cultural national and civilisational identities and resolve not to clash in the interest of money and trade. John Maynard Keynes said: 'Money is essentially a destabiliser, and has to be reigned in for economic stability.' This is precisely what the present world regime cannot do.

**I**n fact, the IMF-World Bank-GATT formulation was based on this very idea that money being a destabiliser had to be checked; this applied with greater force to transnational money which worked on the basis of exchange rates between currencies. The IMF was created with the fundamental idea of ensuring stable exchange rates. The world currencies remained firmly linked to the US dollar and the US dollar was linked to gold at a firm rate of 35 USD per ounce of gold.

This system worked well till 1971 when, because of the run on US gold reserves and the world losing confidence in US dollar convertibility, it depreciated from 35 to over 400 per ounce of gold. More significantly, the world shifted to the present system of floating currency values determined by market force of demand and supply of currencies against one another.

It was precisely to avoid this situation that the IMF was set up. The only protection that the weak currencies of the world had against the strong ones was eroded. And now we have a world currency market in which speculative trade in derivatives exceeds 1.2 trillion dollars a day against the annual world trade in goods and services of 4.5 trillion dollars. So, the speculative currency

market has emerged as the chief arbiter of transnational and even intranational economics.

Akio Morita's letter to the G7 leaders pointedly invited their attention to this point. Morita asked them to answer a vital question: If Japan, through efficiency and cost-cutting, increases its production physically by 10%, and if the yen value goes down by 12%, has Japan grown by 10% or fallen by 2%? He asked them another question: Does anyone control the forces that determine currency values? He pointed out that the derivative trading income of Citibank exceeded (in 1992) 150 million dollars a day!

Realising that the great leaders had no answer for any of these questions, Akio Morita argued that a world trade regime required a common world currency. It followed that in the absence of a world currency there cannot be a world trade regime, particularly if the currency for world trade is in the control of one monopoly, country or in the hands of an oligarchy.

**T**he entire effort of the EC is to evolve a currency to match the dollar. But that would create a competitor for the dollar, not answer the question which Akio Morita had raised. Any long term analysis of the present-day world trade regime would indicate not its durability and stability but its instability and transitional nature. So globalisation and global trade regimes are unstable in their very conception and structure.

The issue is whether a nation should restructure itself to suit the unstable global structure and ever-changing global institutions? That is, should a nation be largely directed by global perspectives and institutions or be mainly guided by factors inherent to itself? In other words, should an ever changing global agenda lead a nation to marginalise its national ideas,

beliefs and institutions, or should it be directed by its own national agenda based on its own ideas, in which the global situation plays a marginal role. If the answer is yes – then it is a return to swadeshi. It is this awareness, both at the national and global level, which is gradually persuading the Indian establishment not to treat the idea of swadeshi with contempt.

**W**hat we have now is a slow and painfully slow return to swadeshi and nationalism. That is where the civilisational assertion of India commenced in the pre-independence days. Swadeshi and nationalism were the foundation of the Indian freedom movement. They should have been the foundation of a free India. But the Anglo-Saxon domination of the Indian polity and establishment virtually defeated the very objective of the Indian struggle for freedom. The result was the fallacious attempt to westernise India on the socialist model. When socialism could not scratch the skin of the Indian psyche and collapsed with the demise of global communism, they swung to another Anglo-Saxon view, westernisation through globalisation. This too has become a transition, rather than the destination.

We started the 20th century with swadeshi and nationalism; we are nearing the end of the century with the very same concepts – swadeshi and nationalism. The long interlude with socialism and the current interlude with globalisation are mere flirtations of the Indian elite establishment lacking in self-confidence. Ultimately, Indian society's unwillingness to disown its age-old values and traditions is manifest in the realisation that globalisation cannot be the core thought of India; it is India which will be the core of India, with the world as a marginal influence.

# Swadeshi or self-reliance?

ASHOK MITRA

FOR someone like the present writer reared in a dusty Bengal town seething with radicalism in the late twenties and the early thirties, *swadeshi* in the childhood days had its charm. But it was a partly suspect, partly derisive category too. Mahatma Gandhi, we would freely inform one another, was a prisoner of the Birlas and the Bajajs; the invocation of *swadeshi* was not so much in protest against the immiseration of the Indian masses by the British industrial and commercial monopolies as for the purpose of advancing the interests of the nascent Indian bourgeoisie. We knew what our alternative line was going to be: pursuit of the objective of national self-reliance.

Once the British were expelled, industry and agriculture, we would explain, will be re-built on the basis of the country's own resources. The extent of external dependence will be severely cut down, which did not, however, imply doing without foreign goods and technology of all descriptions. The import of such material and processes from overseas will, however, be in accordance with the dictum of a strict equivalence of trade: imports will be fully paid for by our exports. The nation will be self-reliant, the accompanying conditions of life and living will nonetheless not be like those generally associated with a closed economy.

Till as long as the international terms of trade were not hopelessly tilted against the country and the transnational corporations did not indulge in outrageous hanky-panky with the prices of imported merchandise and inputs, national self-reliance will suggest a degree of openness which will enable the country to enjoy the advantages of superior technology brought in from richer countries.

This genre of *swadeshi* philosophy, however, depended upon one important pre-condition. Maybe foreigners were not enamoured with our economic ideology; maybe there was a continuing controversy on one or two major issues with the colonial power that had been ejected from the country, for instance, dispute over the quantum of compensation to be paid against the takeover of previously foreign-owned installations. It was not considered altogether inconceivable that the former imperial countries might gang up and refuse to trade with us, thereby starving us of much needed technology and capital equipment as well as key raw materials – and perhaps foodgrains too; all this could push our economy to the brink of disaster.

We were not quite victims of uncalled for panic. Historical precedents were not exactly hard to come by. The situation that confronted post-

revolution Soviet Union for a number of years from the mid 1920s onwards was not altogether different from our conjectural hypothesis. Winston Churchill was leading a one-man band in Britain demanding immediate military excursions against the scandal of a communist state polluting the earth. White Russians, who had escaped to Western Europe and the United States of America, were raising funds to organise an army of invasion. The western press was full of the exploits, real or imaginary, of such ferocious anti-radicals as Kolchak and Denikin. Adding to this commotion was the outrage caused by the declaration by the Soviet leadership that no compensation was to be paid to foreign capitalists and equity-holders for their past investments in Russian industry and mining.

**T**his last act of insolence was particularly galling, and western governments, livid with rage, decided to impose an informal economic embargo upon the Soviet Union. The communists, it was deemed, would be denied the supply of crucial industrial raw material and state-of-the-art technology; none of the western countries would export commodities and services to the Soviet Union and none would import merchandise from that country either. Despite the tacit understanding reached among the capitalist countries, there were occasional breaches in the concordat. For instance, buccaneers like Arnold Hammer, a U.S. citizen, discovered stratagems for bypassing the informal embargo and arranged shipments of goods to and from the Soviet Union, thereby easing the economic strain experienced by the world's till-then-only socialist nation. In the process, Hammer also built a private egg-nest for himself; that is another story though.

In essence, western manoeuvres rendered the Soviet Union into a pariah

state. The communist nation had to learn to survive in a hostile milieu. It could do so only by evolving an economic model which laid stress on exclusive dependence on the nation's own resources for sustenance and growth. The fact that the Soviet Union was a huge land mass, with an immense diversity of natural and mineral wealth, helped. But the crucial element in the picture was the surge of enthusiasm for a consistency model appropriate for a closed economy. A group of young economists and statisticians working in the Gosplan took the lead in the matter; they soon broke new ground. One model developed by the economist Fe'ldman attracted wide attention; its logic was implicitly accepted by the Soviet authorities as the basis for resource allocation so as to ensure self-reliant and yet rapid economic growth.

**T**he Fe'ldman model was quintessentially swadeshi in the narrowest sense – and perhaps in the broadest sense as well. Imagine a country which, for whatever reason, neither exports nor imports. It has nonetheless both the will as well as the necessity to grow. In order to attain growth, it is important for it to arrange for investment, that is to say, large-scale capital formation. Since the country is by assumption underdeveloped, it has no extensive base of industrial output and hardly any production of capital goods. The economy is unable to import goods of this kind because it is a closed economy, whether by volition or because of decisions taken by external powers. It has, accordingly, to start investment activity from scratch.

This is possible only if, right from the commencing year, a significant proportion of the national product is set aside as saving which could fructify as capital formation. The higher the proportion of savings, the

higher will be the rate of investment goods; the higher, it follows, will be the overall rate of growth in the economy. The principal issues for decision at any point of time are therefore: (a) the allocation of production between investment and consumption, and (b) the allocation of investment between capital formation for the production of investment goods and that for the production of consumer goods.

**G**eo-political considerations can influence the parameters of the model at this stage. The country is encircled by capitalists, who can at any moment violate its borders. It is therefore important to strengthen, with extraordinary speed, capacity in the capital goods production sector, including the production of defence equipment. The highest emphasis has accordingly to be placed on boosting further the rate of investment. In a closed economy, the rate of domestic savings will be mathematically equal to the rate of investment. Raising the proportion of investment goods in the system will automatically lead to a rise in the rate of savings and investment; it will also ensure that the rate of consumption goes down, for investment goods are neither edible nor usable for any other form of consumption.

The rigorous application of the Fe'ldman model will yield, even for an impeccably closed economy, an exceptionally high rate of growth and this despite the non-availability of external credit of any kind and the absence of foreign trade. Modalities pursued by the Soviet planning authorities in the 1930s and the 1940s were in strict conformity with the Fe'ldman prescription: consumption was cut down to the bare minimum and investment was pushed up.

This stern model of growth, to be even moderately successful, evidently calls for a strong administrative

arrangement which can put a brake on the propensity to consume on the part of different sections of the population. This is no easy task. In enforcing the regulatory measures, the authorities need to keep in constant touch with the desires and urges of the people, just as much with their complaints and grievances. The adaptation of the Fe'ldman model was indeed responsible for the extraordinarily high rate of growth attained in the Soviet Union during the decades from the 1930s onwards; the enlargement of the heavy industry base and the infrastructure for a strong defence network were the outstanding achievements of the model. At the same time, though, the failure, for whatever reason, of the Soviet leadership to gauge the sentiments of the masses, including their hankering for a richer level of consumption, was a major reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union in the final quarter of the century.

**S**logan-mongers shouting themselves hoarse in favour of swadeshi will therefore need to be clear in their minds on the alternative they want to opt for. In the current milieu, with the tide of globalisation rising high and large sections of the middle class, particularly the younger progeny, completely sold on consumerism, an economic programme of swadeshi along Fe'ldman lines is, on the face of it, a patent impossibility in India. But suppose in the wake of the Pokhran explosions, the western governments, particularly the U.S. administration, are so peeved with India that they decide to enforce economic sanctions in a ruthless manner. The country will sooner or later then face enormous difficulties in its external economic accounts. In such a situation, curbs on consumption will have to be ordained, irrespective of whether the domestic consumers like it or not. This hard

fact of life will have to be driven home into the psyche of the comfortably placed.

Swadeshi has its flip side, just as the swadeshi bomb has. Should opting for the bomb mean a season of cessation of foreign credit and assistance, a curb on consumption, temporary or otherwise, has to be the inevitable consequence. There is no doubt that this will herald a crisis of major proportions, for this nation has proceeded extraordinarily far with the thoughtless indulgence of high consumption on the part of its upper classes. To restrain that propensity could indeed provoke fierce resistance.

**M**ind you, a strict enforcement of the Fe'ldman model will not make much of a difference to the living standards of the overwhelming masses of the country's poor: they are deprived of most of their basic needs now, they will continue to be deprived of basic necessities of life in the altered circumstances as well. It is the upper and middle classes who will have to face the predicament of undergoing sacrifice, something altogether foreign to their experience until now. They are unlikely to accept such an arrangement, unless of course a convulsion of the dimension of what has accrued in Indonesia also overruns them.

Swadeshi is a hard taskmaster. It and a soft state do not go together. And those who keep clinging to the notion that, never mind official sanctions from western countries, the leeway will be made up by larger private capital inflows are living in a fools paradise. But the present set of rulers, going by the desperate manner in which they have commenced to humour foreign economic interests, know fully well which side their bread is buttered. Swadeshi is dead – and buried several fathom deep.



# Economic policy as a by-product

VINOD VYASULU

'I didn't know that Cheshire-Cats always grinned; in fact, I didn't know that cats could grin.'

'They all can,' said the Duchess; 'and most of 'em do.'

'I don't know of any that do,' Alice said very politely, feeling quite pleased to have got into the conversation.

'You don't know much,' said the Duchess; 'and that's a fact.'

Alice did not like the tone of this remark, and thought it would be well to introduce some other subject of conversation. While she was trying to fix on one, the cook took a cauldron of soup off the fire, and at once set to work throwing everything within her reach at the Duchess and the baby – the fire-irons came first; then followed a shower of saucepans, plates and dishes. The Duchess took no notice of them even when they hit her; and the baby was howling so much already, that it was quite impossible to say whether the blows hurt it or not.

Lewis Carroll

THERE is usually a difference between what a political party says it will do if elected and what it actually does when elected. What a party promises has something to do with its vision of the future, its hopes for the people, and its

assessment about the chances of winning. What it actually does has to do with the realities of exercising power. One may expect this to be true of the new Bharatiya Janata Party led coalition as well. Especially because there are known differences on many issues between the various parties that constitute the ruling alliance.

When it comes to the BJP vision and what it has promised, things are not all that clear. In its early days as the Jana Sangh, the precursor of the BJP, the party had simple free market ideas. If anything, it was an adjunct of the better known Swatantra Party. The Jana Sangh merged with other parties, on an anti-Congress platform, to form the Janata Party after the Emergency. Its economic policy then got merged into that of the larger party. Anyway, at that time the economy was not the major issue – restoring the democratic process was.<sup>1</sup>

1. And that was not completely done. For example the 74th amendment to the Constitution did not undo all that Indira Gandhi had

When in 1980, this group split from the Janata Party to form the BJP, the major issue was one of dual membership – in the RSS. It was this that formed the bedrock of the vision of the new BJP, which proclaimed itself a Party With A Difference. It is part of what is today called the Sangh Parivar – a set of institutions that work closely together, of which the BJP is the political arm. It speaks of an Indian-ness, of what is today called *Hindutva*. Related economic concepts seem to be self-reliance and *swadeshi*. The basic vision seems to be of a free, independent, economically strong India. That is something many will share. The differences will come over ways of converting that vision to reality.

**T**he party has been engaged in carving out a distinct identity for itself. It believes that India is 'one nation, one culture, one people', and that it speaks on their behalf. It calls parties like the Congress and the left 'pseudo-secular'. India, it argues, can emerge as a world power only if it draws on its traditional strengths, which, it asserts, are encapsulated in *Hindutva*. It speaks of a glorious past on which present day India must be built.<sup>2</sup> It sees western culture as a distraction, as a fetter on our efforts to reconstruct that past. It argues that in recent times India has gone on a different path,<sup>3</sup> and this the BJP seeks to correct. Clearly, there have been

done in the 72nd amendment viz. on the need for the President to act on advice given by the Council of Ministers. When it comes to authoritarian tendencies, all the mainstream parties seem to be in agreement. This may become a big issue in the coming years.

2. Those who disagree do not deny the glorious past. They also point out that Indian society was marked by (gender and other) injustice and inequality and that India in future must not continue this. They point to the achievements of others and what we can learn from them.

3. Nehruvian socialism, undesirable westernisation, and so on. Isolationism and autarky

errors in the past that have been pointed out to the public; but it seeks to correct them, not in an administrative sense but at a fundamental level, by introducing correctives based on its notion of *Hindutva*. This is clear from its election manifesto. It is also clear that many do not agree, but that is another matter.

**T**oday, the BJP is setting the agenda in much the same way as the Congress did some years ago. In its insistence on *Hindutva* the BJP differs from all the other parties, including many who are its coalition partners.<sup>4</sup> For the time being, in the interests of being in power, it has said that this matter will not be part of the National Agenda of Governance of the ruling coalition. But it is unlikely to give it up all together. What it can do, it will probably do. The effect of that, so far, has been anything but positive.

It would appear from all this that *the economic content of the party's programme is derived from something else*. It is not a distinct entity within that ideology, but an aspect –

are not ruled out in this view. Some argue that eliminating all foreign influences can only result in good.

4. There are many reasons why other parties have come together with the BJP in the recent elections. One is opposition to the Congress – as in the case of the Telugu Desam Party. Another is local considerations, as in the case of Jayalalitha's AIADMK. The Samata Party is opposed to multinational corporations and thus finds the economic dimension of *swadeshi* as protection attractive. These parties also have major differences with the BJP. The United Front came into being on the negative platform of keeping the BJP out of power; such an agreement on the basis of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' cannot stand the test of time when the parties are pulled by different pressures – as the TDP case shows. But it did leave behind some positive features, such as respect for federalism. It showed that coalitions without charismatic leaders from the Nehru family can work. What is needed is agreement on a concrete programme of action to which many parties are committed; the

not necessarily major – of *Hindutva* itself. Thus, for a student of economics, it is not easy<sup>5</sup> to identify the different strands that go into the 'economic package' of this political party. For the party itself this may not be an important question. 'Look after *Hindutva*, and the economy will look after itself' seems to be the basic attitude – or premise, of the BJP.

The nuclear explosions are, I think, evidence of this attitude. They were important in terms of an assertion of Indian pride – and Saturday the 16th was celebrated by the BJP – not the ruling alliance, but the BJP – as *gaurav divas*. If the country's economy suffers as a result of sanctions imposed by the international community led by the United States, it is proof of their ill intentions towards us. It strengthens the *swadeshi* idea. And it is not inconsistent with moves to attract foreign investment after the blast, because that will be seen as increased respect for a nuclear and powerful India. There is no inconsistency involved because there is no basic theory involved.

**T**his is particularly so because the party has co-opted issues and programmes from many others as it went along. The uncharitable can say that for a party that never understood the economy this is understandable opportunism. For example, its ideas on self reliance – *swadeshi*, to use that confusing term – have a lot in common

country seems to be far from that goal. The issues that divide political parties are many, and I doubt we have seen the last of such alliances.

5. I find it difficult to think of any from among say the top 100 Indian economists who openly ally themselves with the BJP. It has not been able to reconstitute the Planning Commission, and justification for its policies has not been coming from the group of nationally respected economists. It was different with the earlier regimes.

with what was often understood as the position of the left. That is, that the country must build up a self-reliant domestic industry, with protection if need be,<sup>6</sup> to stand against imperialism. Again, for the same reason, the left has been a strong proponent of the public sector. The BJP has also made pro-public sector noises, but without the ideological reasoning of the left. Thus, the proposal to disinvest to raise money is easy to understand; the problem is to justify it to a sceptical public.

**T**he left has reasons for opposing Congress type globalisation. It has reasons for opposing the opening up of the insurance sector, or the kind of reforms that have been introduced in the financial sector. The privatisation of nationalised banks, the permission to start new private banks, the expansion of foreign banks, the setting up of local area banks – these are all things that the left is opposed to, but which the Congress and the United Front governments introduced. In spite of such agreements, the left would not join hands with the BJP with which it has fundamental differences. The BJP had mildly opposed these policies when in the opposition to the United Front. But its reason is simple: it ‘hurts’ India in some (ill-defined) sense. The left opposes them ideologically.

The left had developed these ideas in the context of a fight against imperialism, and they were grounded in a well defined ideology. For our purpose here, it is not pertinent whether the left is correct or not: the left has an ideological position from which its programmes are logically derived. The BJP does not. Yet, the BJP has taken on many of the left’s programmes. These same programmes are now packaged in Hindutva. Defying the World Bank

and the WTO (while following our commitments to it completely in its export-import policy – which perhaps is the policy of the Lok Shakti) are patriotic actions in this framework. What is to be done after such defiance is left unsaid. Defiance, it would appear, is enough. It restores our national gaurav!

The BJP speaks of liberalisation, but opposes globalisation.<sup>7</sup> It has the support of a number of important Indian industrialists. Many years ago, Viren Shah was an MP from this party. Today, people like Rahul Bajaj have given it their support. These groups argue for some kind of protection, but given that they have faced the heat of competition and lost market share, it is probably self-interest suitably disguised. Of course, that in itself does not make it wrong.

**S**ince India had a long regime of protection, in which some groups got an advantage, such relationships have been useful to some of the BJP constituents. Is the BJP just paying off a political debt by talking of swadeshi, or has it a sound basis in reason for what it is doing? The withdrawal of several budget proposals when its supporters – or vested interests – protested, showed a lack of economic logic; it was simple opportunism. We must remember that much water has flown down the Ganga in the last seven years. Is it feasible now to talk of liberalisation without globalisation? How and why?<sup>8</sup> The issues have to be spelt out in concrete detail, not fuzzy intentions. The manifesto,

7. My own position on these issues has been spelt out in *Crisis and Response*, Madhyam Books, New Delhi, 1996.

8. These issues have been discussed in Amit Bhaduri and Deepak Nayyar: *The Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalisation*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1996. But I do not think the BJP would go along with this formulation.

the NAG and the budget<sup>9</sup> have little to say about all this. The budget, if anything, shows an ostrich-like attitude to the economy.

**Y**et, the BJP supported the Congress government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao when it reversed long standing policy and adopted a policy of liberalisation and globalisation. If it were not for the support of the BJP in 1991, the new economic policy would never have survived. Yet, the party remained in opposition because Hindutva kept it distinct. For it to now claim that there were fundamental flaws in the new economic policy is simply untenable. This feat was possible because the economy was not its main concern – Hindutva was, and that was better captured by the Masjid-Mandir issue. *Rath yatras* are more important than economic policy! More correctly, economic policy follows from a rath yatra.

In states where it is in power, it has negotiated loans from the World Bank – in U.P. and Haryana, for example, for power sector reform. The conditions set by the World Bank do not differ, for example from those in Congress ruled Orissa – the forerunner of power sector reforms of the World Bank type. There is therefore no reason to expect that it has anything very different in mind for the country.

In a real sense, the BJP must be given political credit, along with Narasimha Rao, for the new economic policy. As an opposition party it could have voted against the Congress economic package: indeed, it would have been expected to play its role as an opposition party. It did not do so. And the reason can only be that economic issues are peripheral to its vision of India. Its battles lie elsewhere. The

6. It is not clear how this differs from the old Nehruvian import substitution industrialisation model.

9. For my views on the budget, see *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 June 1998.

economy is a minor nuisance that has to be dealt with. It is a political headache to be treated with paracetamol or nuclear blasts – it does not matter which.

**W**hat about the approvals for foreign investment that the Industry Ministry, under the control of the BJP's Sikandar Bakht, has been awarding at breakneck speed? What about its soft line in the Maruti dispute? Does this not contradict its Hindutva/swadeshi line? Is the government in any way aware of any inconsistency in this matter?

How does the ruling coalition characterise the economy? Let us consider the fiscal situation. The BJP has kept the finance portfolio because of the power that this ministry can wield. The PM was unable to get his first nominee for the job. It did not seem to matter! If the economy was on top of the agenda, this ministry could not have been treated in this cavalier manner. The Planning Commission has only a deputy chairman – an important party member, but it has yet to be reconstituted – and he has been busy with international diplomacy. For a party that considers the economy important, this should have been a matter of priority.

Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha has talked of tough decisions. He has promised to reduce the fiscal deficit. The earlier government failed to do this, while ignoring the revenue deficit – the difference between annual income and expenditure of the state. The fiscal target can be achieved by further reducing the role of government in the economy – something that the BJP may not be averse to in some sectors. But how? His budget, if anything, has aggravated both the deficits.

Recently, the coalition faced problems when it chose to promulgate

ordinances to set up regulatory agencies for pricing electric power. Here it has behaved like any past government, displaying a preference for promulgating ordinances to introducing bills in the legislature. And it has promised that free power for farmers will continue even after the agencies begin to function. This will increase the subsidy burden. Where then is the difference in terms of economic policy?

**G**iven its middle class base, it is under pressure to increase the limit of income free from income tax. This demand may have been relevant in the heyday of Indira Gandhi when direct tax rates were high. But today, when the highest marginal rate is a ridiculous 30%, this is, in economic terms, completely unjustified. But for a party for which the economy is (really) on a backburner, the claims of political support are probably more important. But then, where will the revenues come to finance free power to farmers – and other goodies for others?

The defence minister has been making noises about India's enemies, and the need to be prepared. He comes from a trade union, socialist background and possibly sees an increase in defence expenditure as beneficial to his constituency. He has long favoured a nationalist stance, and his anti-multinational credentials are impeccable. He is also among the honest politicians of this country. But if the government goes along with him, where will the money come from?

And now this government has taken the irreversible step of conducting nuclear tests.<sup>10</sup> This has triggered sanctions, especially from the United States. Is this the BJP's way of intro-

10. In the process, giving the go-by to the morally strong position we had for not signing the NPT and the CTBT.

ducing swadeshi?<sup>11</sup> And if it is then why has it cleared so many foreign investment proposals immediately after the tests? Is that consistent with swadeshi? Or is keeping an important lobby happy more important?

**I**f it is possible to state clearly what India's priorities are in the economic front we can proceed to try and see what the BJP government may do. I list them as follows:

\* A large percentage of the population is below the poverty line. While it is true that there has been some improvement in the poverty situation in the last twenty years, it is by no means enough. Therefore, a strategy to reduce poverty must be given importance in economic policy. There are, of course, many approaches to this. Whether the government will continue with the 'growth is the best way of reducing poverty' approach of the structural adjustment programme remains to be seen.

\* It is easy to talk of growth, but will give away policies continue? Free power to farmers in some states, we are told, will continue. How about other areas of pandering to special interest groups? Will irrigation water be priced? What about fertilizer subsidies? What about budgetary support for all kinds of things in the public sector? Even if some of these are to continue, where will the money come from? And come without the inflationary pressures that accompany deficit financing?

\* The situation with respect to nutrition, health and education continues to be dismal. The social sectors have been neglected in India. To a large extent this is the responsibility of the states. A recent estimate shows that Karnataka spends only seven

11. Such an argument was made by Narendar Pani, *The Economic Times*, 16 May 1998.

rupees per year (after excluding salaries) per enrolled child on primary education.<sup>12</sup> And this is just slightly higher than the all India average! In the last fifty years we have spent far too little on these two vital sectors, constitutional obligations notwithstanding. If the BJP were to change this they would really be doing something new. But there has been no evidence so far that they will break with the past.

\* The bloated government bureaucracy in the Union, states and parastatals, needs to be curbed. This is a necessary condition for the economy to move forward. Yet, the BJP coalition has pandered to the *habus* – apart from the new pay-scales approved earlier, it has raised the age of retirement. All this does not bode well for a public sick of corruption from this segment of the population.

\* The fiscal system needs an overhaul. The earlier governments have spent considerable time in testing the Laffer hypothesis, but the evidence is clearly not in favour. Resources will have to be raised from direct taxation. Efforts by the earlier government to widen the tax base will have to continue. But the BJP in the past has promised wide ranging relief to different classes of people. These will now come back to haunt it. Without such increase in direct taxes, and an increase in the proportion of revenue from such taxes, little can be achieved.

**W**e have a situation in which low priority areas like defence and subsidies have political claims on the budget. We have a situation in which wild promises of tax relief have been made by the BJP, probably in the expectation that it will remain comfortably in the

opposition. Or because the economy is not its major concern. Today, as the leader of the ruling coalition, it has to act. And it has no ideas of its own, at least as far as the economy is concerned.

**T**he irony lies in the fact that the BJP may really be ahead of others in the questions it has raised. We have to ask what a nation state means today. The world today is different from the one that emerged from the throes of the Second World War. The idea of the nation state has considerably evolved. The Euro has taken birth; the multi-lateral agreement on investment is being seriously discussed. The monolithic, centralised state is giving way to something else. Markets and technology are binding the world together. These are developments that require serious thought. Recent developments must be evaluated; the experience of nations voluntarily ceding elements of sovereignty, as in Europe, has to be much better understood. What will the multilateral agreement on investment imply? What is the nature of the nation state in the emerging world environment? The BJP has asked the question, but looked to mythology for an answer.

No one will argue that international relations are conducted on the assumption that all nations are equal – if that were so, some countries would not have a veto on the United Nations Security Council. No one argues that the CTBT is non-discriminatory. But many do point out that, imperfect as it is, there were advantages to be got by signing it.

But in an unequal world there is no uniformity. There are areas of opportunity as Korea has demonstrated. History also tells us that novelty keeps emerging. Historical paths are unique – what Korea did yesterday, others cannot imitate today. Each country has to find its own path. As the

Mexican proverb so astutely points out, a path is made by walking.

The BJP is right in stressing the need for India to make its own path. But that path has to be made by our diverse people building on the many things – good and bad – our history has given us. We cannot go back in history. In insisting on the base of one nation, one culture, one people, it seems to be ignoring history. Today's nation state cannot be modelled on a fortress.<sup>13</sup> It has to be open to ideas and influences. It has to be inclusive, not exclusive.<sup>14</sup> To take a narrow view, to deny ourselves the benefit of wisdom and experience elsewhere, is the politics of despair. And now, with Pakistan having returned the compliment by conducting its own nuclear explosions, both countries will face sanctions. In an eye-ball to eye-ball confrontation, spending scarce money over weapons that cannot be used, modernity may bypass us both. For neither, it appears, is economics a major concern.

**W**hile each country's tradition is a valuable heritage, that tradition alone is not enough for economic and social progress. There is much to learn from the experience of others, and there is much work to do in trying to define one's own path to traverse. That is a task waiting to be done. The BJP, through Hindutva, is not attempting it. It is only living in a mythical past.

13. Historical parallels could be the National Socialist Party of Germany with its concept of Aryan purity and the Black Shirts of Italy, like the disciplined khaki shorts of the RSS. What can we learn from these historical experiences?

14. The BJP seems to have embarked on a path where it will pursue its agenda, especially in matters that are irreversible. In testing nuclear weapons it has changed the situation for all future governments, whatever their views. It may be expected to take more such steps – especially where the states are concerned.

12. Indira and Vinod Vyasulu. Education Finances in Karnataka. A report submitted to the District Primary Education Programme, Government of Karnataka, Bangalore, 1997.

# Food freedom and economic freedom

VANDANA SHIVA

GLOBALISATION has generated widespread social, economic and ecological insecurity. It has undermined citizen's freedoms and established corporate rule. What we need is a new movement for freedom from corporate rule, the threats from which are most significant in the area of food and agriculture since food is the most vital of all necessities and agriculture is the most significant livelihood of our people.

Globalisation has become a threat to agriculture and food security by allowing global corporations to become larger and take control over agriculture, and placing the right to trade

above the right to food. It has introduced new forms of property rights in seeds and plants through 'intellectual property rights' and has introduced new genetic engineering technologies, such as the 'terminator technology', which is the equivalent of the nuclear bomb in the field of genetics.

Food is a good symbol to see how the powers of citizens, the state and corporations are shifting. On the one hand, the role and function of the state in guaranteeing the right to food is being dismantled. During the World Food Summit, the U.S. Secretary of State stated that food could no longer be recognised as a right since the right

to food would interfere in free trade of food commodities. On the other, domains in which people have organised themselves are being taken over by the state on behalf of corporations. Two examples of this threat to people's freedom in the area of food are the denial of farmers to save seed and denial of citizens to set food standards.

**P**atents on seed have been used by corporations to treat the inalienable right of farmers to save seed as a theft and a crime. Organic standards and labelling are a means which people have created to ensure that food is free of chemicals. For small organic farmers it is a means of survival and a way of guaranteeing food safety for the consumer.

The U.S is now changing the standards of 'organic' labelling. The USDA will allow fruits and vegetables to be labelled 'organic' even if they have been genetically engineered, irradiated, treated with additives and raised on contaminated sewage. Under the new proposals, 'organic' livestock can be raised in batteries and fed with the offal of other animals. Organic food is thus being redefined to include all that it was meant to replace. The law also forbids setting of standards higher than those established by the department. Farmers will, in other words, be forbidden by law from producing and selling 'good' food.

Similarly, in the area of genetically engineered crops and food, while the corporations claim absolute rights through 'intellectual property rights', they are also ensuring that they will bear no responsibility for the ecological and social costs arising from genetic engineering. Genetically engineered crops and foods are being launched in a context in which profits are privatised through IPRs and costs are socialised, even though the pub-

lic is deliberately kept ignorant of those costs. Social and ecological costs are hidden from the public view through denial of the need for bio-safety regulations and the consumer's 'right to know' through labelling of genetically engineered foods. Society is thus being pushed into a situation in which citizens increasingly become victims of ecological and public health disasters but can do nothing about it. They are being robbed of their basic rights as producers and consumers by being forced to accept costs to their health and environment, which as free and informed citizens exercising democratic rights they would never accept.

**T**he imposition of genetic engineering and its potential hazards for society is a product of totalitarian structures in which citizens are denied their fundamental rights to safety and security, and are prevented from exercising their democratic choice in the vital area of food production and consumption. The emergence of genetic engineering has been based on the violation of democratic rights of people, and through the establishment of totalitarian structures.

Corporate totalitarianism is different from other forms of totalitarianism because it is exercised through a fiction and hence is not like conventional dictatorships in which the dictator has a clear identity which people recognise and see. Corporate totalitarianism is also different from dictatorships we are more familiar with because it is the only slavery which does not need the slave. It rules through dispensability rather than exploitation. It treats communities, people, countries, ecosystems, species as disposable and dispensable. They have no protection, no sanctity. Only the dollar is sacred.

The terminator technology is a good example of how the sanctity of

life is being destroyed and that of the dollar established. The USDA and Delta and Pine Land, now owned by Monsanto, have a patent on a technology which leads to the termination of seed germination to ensure that farmers have to go to corporations to buy seed every year. When we sow seed we pray, 'let this seed not be exhausted.' The prayer of Monsanto as expressed through the terminator is, 'let this seed be terminated.'

**M**eanwhile, the global corporations controlling agriculture are becoming bigger and more powerful. Monsanto, which used to be a chemical company, has bought up seed companies worldwide, including DeKalb, Agracetus, Calgene, Holden, Asgrow, Mahyco and most recently Cargill Seeds. Corporations like Monsanto are genetically engineering seeds so that more of their proprietary chemicals are required. For example, Round-up Ready crops are designed to be resistant to Monsanto's broad spectrum herbicide which kills all plants. Monsanto's terminator technology is aimed at preventing harvested seeds from germinating so that farmers are enslaved to it for seed supply.

Globalisation is thus establishing a system in which species have no freedom, farmers have no freedom, consumers have no freedom, and countries have no freedom. We are entering a system designed to ensure total control of corporations over the food system, which translates into food slavery.

*Swadeshi* agriculture in this context of global monopolies needs to be based on:

- \* protection of indigenous biodiversity as a source of freedom for nature and farmers;
- \* protection of the collective, cumulative innovation embodied in our indigenous knowledge systems through

alternatives to western style industrial IPR systems by evolving collective rights regimes that protect our intellectual and biological commons; and \* freeing farmers from chemical intensive, debt intensive agriculture through internal input, sustainable agriculture systems.

**S**wadeshi agriculture is based on freedom for the earth from poisons and toxics, freedom for biodiversity to evolve and create abundance, freedom for farmers from debt and patents, and freedom for consumers from high prices and contaminated foods. The contemporary discourse on swadeshi and *swaraj* has, however, been severely distorted by the discourse on globalisation.

Central to India's movement for freedom from colonialism were the concepts of swadeshi, swaraj, and *satyagraha*. Swadeshi is the spirit of regeneration and rejuvenation, a method of creative reconstruction in periods of dependency and colonisation. According to swadeshi philosophy, people possess both materially and morally what they need to evolve to build their society and economy and free themselves of oppressive structures. Economic freedom, according to swadeshi, is based on endogenously driven development rather than externally controlled development.

For Gandhi, swadeshi was a positive concept based on building what a community has in terms of resources, skills, institutions and transforming them where they were inadequate. Imposed resources, institutions and structures leave a people unfree and are non-sustainable. The collapse of the Nehruvian model based on import substitution rather than endogenous development indicates how patterns of development which do not emerge from self organi-

sation are unsustainable. Swadeshi for Gandhi was central to the creation of peace, freedom and sustainable development. It is based on people's economies and their ability to organise themselves. Swadeshi or self-organisation in economic affairs is the basis of economic freedom, without which there can be no political freedom, or self-governance and self-rule.

Swaraj, or self-rule, is the birth-right of all people. The phrase that echoed most during our freedom movement was *swaraj hamara janmasidh adhikar hai* – self-rule is our birth-right. For Gandhi, and for the contemporary social movements in India, self-rule does not imply governance by a centralised state but decentralised self-governance by local communities. From the mountains to the seas 'Nate na raj' and 'our rule in our village' are the slogans of our grassroots environmental movements.

**I**n periods of injustice and external domination, when people are denied economic and political freedom, reclaiming freedom requires peaceful non-cooperation with unjust laws and regimes. This peaceful non-cooperation with injustice, revived by Gandhi as *satyagraha*, has been a democratic tradition in India. Literally, *satyagraha* means the struggle for truth. It is Gandhi who argued that no tyranny can enslave a people who consider it immoral to obey laws that are unjust. As he stated in *Hind Swaraj*: 'As long as the superstition that people should obey unjust laws exists, so long will slavery exist. And a non-violent resistance alone can remove such a superstition. *Satyagraha* is the key to self-rule or *swaraj*.'<sup>1</sup>

Swadeshi is not obsolete in today's context. It is the creative alter-

native to both the rule of the centralised national state of the Nehruvian model and the rule of global corporations and global institutions such as the WTO (World Trade Organisation). Economic freedom requires reduced control by the state and minimal control by the World Bank, IMF, WTO, the G7 and global corporations. It is freedom for the people of India to have secure livelihoods, to have control over the policies and resources that make their livelihoods.

**S**ince agriculture is our predominant source of livelihood, the globalisation of agriculture is emerging as the most severe threat to a economic freedom and the survival of the poorest Indians. The suicides by Indian farmers from Andhra Pradesh to Punjab is merely the tip of the iceberg of the economic stress stalking rural India. As farmer Jagjit Singh Brar said at a meeting on suicides organised in Sangrur, 'The farmer is losing his self-confidence. He has lost his freedom and is deep in debt.' The farmers' slavery is linked to the new economic policies which have encouraged free market expansion of seed and agrochemical companies. Costly seeds and costly inputs are being pushed through costly credit and farmers' debts are rising, pushing ever increasing numbers to suicides due to indebtedness.<sup>2</sup> Future slavery of farmers is emerging both through new 'intellectual property rights' and through corporate control of agriculture.

The Eurocentric concept of property views only capital investments as investment and hence treats returns on capital investment as the only right that needs protection. Non-western indigenous communities and cultures recognise that investment can also

1. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1938, p. 29.

2. Vandana Shiva and Afsar Jafri, 'Seeds of Suicide: the ecological and human costs of globalisation of agriculture', *RFSTE*, 1998.



be that of labour or of care and nurturance. Rights in such cultural systems protect investments beyond capital. They protect the culture of conservation and the culture of caring and sharing.

**T**he patenting of our indigenous knowledge and biodiversity is one aspect of colonisation of swadeshi knowledge and *desi* seeds. The pressure on India to introduce western style IPR regimes for seeds and agricultural inputs is another.

In its election manifesto the Congress party referred to globalisation as *arthic swaraj* but equated economic freedom with globalisation.<sup>3</sup> The BJP government, which had won elections on an anti globalisation and swadeshi plank, has now made a rapid turn-around, announcing that swadeshi is not anti-globalisation. The commerce ministry removed restrictions from 336 items in its new export-import policy, including pepper and shrimp, remarking that this was swadeshi. The industry minister stated that he would implement TRIPS and that this step was not inconsistent with swadeshi.<sup>4</sup> The agriculture ministry announced that it would allow foreign direct investment (FDI) in agriculture; that this is supposed to be swadeshi.

Be it the BJP or Congress, swadeshi and swaraj are deployed rhetorically, not for economic policy. Every government has implemented the globalisation agenda when in power, even if it had criticised globalisation while in opposition. This is evidence of a growing lack of economic freedom and economic sovereignty.

3. Vandana Shiva, 'Arthic Swaraj or Economic Slavery?' *The Observer*, 3 February 1998.

4. Vandana Shiva and Claude Alvares, 'BJP on Swadeshi: the great u-turn?' *Mainstream*, 25 April 1998.

In the process conditions of self-rule, self-governance and self organisation, especially for the countries of the Third World and for the poorest and smallest producers have been undermined. Globalisation is in fact recolonisation and the trade liberalisation policies of the World Bank, IMF and WTO are no different from the free trade treaty of the East India Company which allowed a trading corporation to take over our land.

The 1717 *firman*s granted to the East India Company by Faruksheer Firman, the great grandson of Aurangzeb, and addressed to the Governors of Bengal, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad, were recorded as follows: 'Dilly, January Anno 1716-17. A translate of three Phirmaunds granted to the Right Hon. English East Company for a free trade, by Faruksheer King of Indostan.' The language and concept of free trade was, therefore, central to the East India Company policy for laying the 'foundation of a large, well-grounded, sure English dominion in India for all time to come.'<sup>5</sup>

**T**he dominant thinking of the Indian elite views globalisation and trade liberalisation as a miracle cure for poverty at a time when the high cost and vulnerability of economic globalisation have become visible through the South East Asian crisis. It views globalisation and foreign direct investment as a recipe for economic freedom at a time when entire economies are being taken over and recolonised by western powers.

The South East Asian countries carried out all the steps prescribed in the globalisation recipe. Today, their banks and financial institutions, their industry and natural resources, have been taken over by western banks and

5. Vandana Shiva, *The East India Company, Free Trade and GATT*, 1994.

transnational corporations. In a recent article, Gerald Segal, Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, stated: 'After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, we spoke of a post-Cold War world. What we can now foresee, amid Asia's financial crisis, is a period dominated by the West.'<sup>6</sup>

**T**he western powers and their strategists view globalisation as recolonisation of the countries that became independent from western colonial rule half a century back. Today the political parties, including the Congress, which had played a key role in our movement for Independence, have adopted this agenda for recolonisation in its election manifesto. What is worse, it calls this new arrangement for economic slavery *arthic swaraj* or economic freedom. The recipes for *arthic swaraj* are neither informed by the economic reality of India, nor by the lessons and experiences from other parts of the world. They are literally lifted from the Bretton Woods institutions and their prescriptions for trade liberalisation and economic reforms.

The South East Asian crisis has been created precisely by financial liberalisation and economic deregulation. The consequence has been a total takeover of the economy through the currency crisis and the IMF programme. Foreign banks and companies are already going through the wrecked economies and buying up local assets and institutions at throw-away prices. This is the same package that the Congress is trying to sell to the Indian people as economic swaraj but which has only one outcome – total economic bondage and economic takeover.

6. *International Herald Tribune*, 27 January 1998.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the restructuring of Thailand's financial system is expected to result in foreign majority ownership in many of the country's 15 commercial banks.<sup>7</sup> In Korea too, the IMF required that foreign investment in the capital markets be liberalised and direct foreign investment procedures simplified and made more transparent. Foreign entities will be allowed to buy 50% of the equity of a listed Korean company by end 1997 and 55% by end 1998, paving the way for foreign takeovers of Korean firms.<sup>8</sup>

**W**hen the election manifesto of a major party in the country states that the threat of foreign takeover no longer exists, that there is no enemy outside, only an enemy within, and hence the concept of swadeshi is no longer relevant, it is either ignorant about the state of the world's economy or deliberately misleading its potential voters. If it is the former, it is unfit to rule; if the latter, it is guilty of being anti-national. Instead of learning from countries which have implemented trade and financial liberalisation and are today in deep crisis as a consequence, promoters of globalisation repeatedly state that we must not be afraid of the world.

To be aware of the consequences of liberalisation on the basis of the South East Asian disaster cannot be interpreted as fear; blindness to facts is not fearlessness, it is foolhardiness. To put your hand in the fire and insist it will not burn is a sign of stupidity, not smartness. The volatile global economy is like a fire, and it 'burns' livelihoods and national economies. Integration into it without caution and some limits is not a cure for poverty, it is a cause for poverty.

It is not a cure for unemployment, it is a recipe for unemployment on an unimaginable scale. The extent of unemployment in Thailand and Indonesia as a result of the crisis today stands at 4 million. In Korea and Malaysia prosperous workers are suddenly on the street.

South East Asia is looking towards India for finding models that provide economic alternatives. The concept of swadeshi is even more relevant today than during the independence movement. It is the key to genuine economic freedom in a period of economic totalitarianism dominated by World Bank, IMF, WTO and TNCs. Swadeshi leads to arthik swaraj. Arthik swaraj without swadeshi is like a building without foundations. It will collapse.

**E**ven though we have the colonialism of the past and recent experience of globalisation as recolonisation, many commentators continue to refer to globalisation as economic freedom and equate swadeshi with the past fifty years of the Nehruvian model. Gurcharan Das says, "There is nothing new about swadeshi, we have practised it since independence and "swadeshi will bring back the license-permit raj".<sup>9</sup> However, swadeshi is an *alternative* to Nehruvian socialism based on centralised state power and the usurpation of the functions of the community by the state. Swadeshi is people-centered, not industry or government-centered.

Sharad Joshi in his article, 'Swadeshi: the third battle', has also equated swadeshi with the Nehruvian rather than the Gandhian legacy. Joshi goes even further to suggest that swadeshi means isolation and India has been isolated for thousands of years. 'The swadeshi brigade is in

power now. It would try to set back the clock and go back to a closed India. It imposed isolation in India for thousands of years. It succeeded in keeping its domain despite the British. It succeeded again 50 years back under the banner of socialism, and hopes to succeed this time once again."<sup>10</sup>

**H**owever, India has been a more open society than any other, welcoming guests and integrating cultures. What seems to be common to these critics of swadeshi is that they equate globalisation with freedom and nationalism with slavery. Our magazines and newspapers often refer to *swadeshi* vs *videshi*, and describe swadeshi as a form of xenophobia. This is a false dualism and a distortion of the meaning of swadeshi. Globalisation is the real xenophobic project because it extinguishes all diversity, it devastates autonomous small producers. It is a project of total control arising from a fear of everything that is alive, free and autonomous. In fact, intellectual property rights, which are central to the globalisation agenda are based on a racist view of knowledge. This racism allows the appropriation of indigenous knowledge, as in the case of bio-piracy of neem, turmeric, basmati, pepper and so on.

Globalisation also breeds xenophobia by creating massive insecurity, which in turn breeds fear and violence among communities and societies. Ethnocide and ethnic cleansing are the gifts of global economic integration which robs people of their basic securities.<sup>11</sup> The concept of swadeshi is not based on the fear of the foreigner.

10. Sharad Joshi, 'Swadeshi: the third battle', *Business Line*, 29 April 1998.

11. Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, South End Press, USA, 1997 and RFSTE, New Delhi, 1998.

7. *Wall Street Journal*, 5-6 December 1997.

8. *Reuters*, 5 December 1997.

9. 'The Fatal Charm of Naturalism', *The Times of India*, 24 April 1998.

It is based on self-organisation and on the recognition that economically powerful global forces are taking over the economic and political structures of our society and hence threatening the livelihoods and freedoms of the people.

**S**wadeshi is based on the recognition that self-organisation is the basis of freedom. Since self-organising systems are autonomous and self-referential, though not insulated from others, they are at peace with themselves and interact under conditions of freedom and peace. A self-organising system knows what it has to import and export in order to maintain and renew itself. It needs nothing else but a reference to itself. It interacts with its environment, but autonomously. The environment only triggers the structural changes; it does not specify or direct them. It is the living system which specifies its structural changes and which patterns in the environment that trigger them. At the political and cultural level, it is this freedom to self-organise that Gandhi saw as the basis of interaction between different societies and cultures. 'I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about as freely as possible, but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.'

The Chilean scientists, Maturana and Varela, have distinguished between two kinds of systems – autopoietic and allopoietic. A system is autopoietic when its function is primarily geared to self-renewal. An autopoietic system refers in the first place to itself and is, therefore, called self-referential. In contrast, an allopoietic system, viz. a machine, refers to a function given from outside, such as the production of a specific output.<sup>12</sup> Swadeshi, in scientific terms,

refers to the building of autopoietic systems as the basis of our cultural, economic and political life.

Globalisation is an example of the transformation of autopoietic systems into allopoietic ones. Globalisation is not the cross-cultural interaction of diverse societies. It is an imposition of a particular culture on all others. Nor is it the search for ecological balance on a planetary scale. It is the predation of one class, one race, and often one gender of a simple species on all others. The 'global' in the dominant discourse is the political space in which the dominant local seeks global control. It frees itself from local, natural and global control and responsibility and limits arising from the imperatives of ecological sustainability and social justice. The global in this sense does not represent the universal human interest; it represents a particular local and parochial interest and culture, which has been globalised through its reach and control, its irresponsibility and lack of reciprocity.

**S**wadeshi is an anti-colonial concept, not an anti-foreigner concept. It is not about people who are outsiders – it refers to structures of power which colonise both internally and externally. It is not xenophobic, it is liberatory because it arises from a spirit of freedom, not the basis of fear.

When the rights of farmers to save, exchange and evolve seed are denied, when the rights of consumers to safe and adequate food are denied, what we have is totalitarianism of a most basic kind, since it is a totalitarianism based on the total control over the vital necessity – food. Swadeshi and satyagraha are the only paths to reclaiming citizen freedom in

this context of economic totalitarianism.

A society in which the only citizens with rights are corporations and their rights are so absolute that they can totally extinguish citizen rights, is not a free society. It is corporate totalitarianism created through free trade arrangements. Economies in which most people are rendered dispensable, and in which most people cannot meet their basic needs, are not free economies for the people. They are free only for capital. Building free societies and free economies implies, above all, putting people before capital. The liberation of people is different from the liberalisation of trade. In fact, trade liberalisation is based on either the dispensability of people or their enslavement.

How do we build alternatives in the context of this totalitarianism of a new kind – a totalitarianism based on the rule of fictions rather than the gun boat, a totalitarianism built on dispensability of the majority rather than their bondage, a totalitarianism in which there is no dictator, no person, no government, but all-pervading corporations which are themselves a legal fiction?

Non-violence requires a withdrawal from participation in violence. The first step in rebuilding free societies is to recognise that globalisation is not a natural phenomena, but an exercise of absolute power for total control. It is a new kind of totalitarianism in which corporations as rulers are attempting to gain total control over life itself, domains that have so far been beyond the control of the market or the state.

The second step in a non-violent search for freedom is to begin to reclaim our self-organising capacities as citizens and communities. This includes non-cooperation with the systems of control that deny us our self-organising capacity. Just as in

12. Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Bio-*

*logical Roots of Human Understanding*, Shambala Publications, Boston, 1992.

agriculture, the shift from chemical to organic farming requires freedom from external inputs by building up internal inputs on the farm, in society, a shift to freedom requires becoming free of, or less dependent on, the 'external inputs' through which corporations control our lives – through finance, control on knowledge and information, through monopoly control on production systems.

**W**e at *Navdanya*, are reclaiming this freedom for seeds, for farmers, for consumers – through a movement for the protection of biodiversity. We protect seed freedom by protecting living seeds and native seed diversity. We protect farmers' livelihoods by helping them break free of the bondage and addiction to chemicals and poisons and by promoting organic agriculture. We protect consumer freedom by helping healthy, nutritious, organic produce to reach the consumer. For us this is the real swadeshi agenda.

Rejuvenating our knowledge and skills to meet our needs with our own resources and our own capacities is the alternative to the monopoly on life inherent in patents on life. I have often described patents on life as the enclosure of the intellectual and biological commons. The alternative to enclosures is the recovery of the commons – protecting the free domain of knowledge exchange by non cooperating with IPR laws which make knowledge exchange, seed exchange, and biodiversity exchange at the local level illegal. We can only be truly free if our minds are free. Controlling and owning the mind and products of the mind reflects a much deeper slavery than slavery itself. The bodies of slaves were bought and sold, their minds were not. Under the new regime of 'free trade', both the body and mind of the people become tradable commodities, the property of the power-

ful to be bought and sold freely. Breaking free of this slavery requires making our bodies and minds free of the ultimate bondage inherent in patents on life.

We, the Third World people, have had to organise ourselves to define our personhood so that we too can govern ourselves, fulfil our humanity, defend our communities and other species. We know what it is like to be excluded. We need to remember how we organised in the past, how we built democratic institutions and cultures. Corporate rule has excluded all people as persons. It has reduced citizenship to being consumers, and by new mechanisms such as denial of the right to know – especially in the domain of genetically engineered foods – the consumer too is like a captive creature. This corporate fiction has to be treated as what it is – a fiction, which can rule over us only to the extent that we allow it to. The most fundamental human rights agenda of our times is to reclaim our humanity in all our diversity.

**A**n inclusive concept of personhood is also an inclusive concept of freedom since it does not imply freedom of one kind for a privileged part of society but protects multidimensional freedoms for all. We can only become free people if our rights are not extinguished by the rights of the corporate fiction.

All liberation movements in recent history have been partial and exclusionist. They excluded other species and diverse cultures. For the first time we have an opportunity to seek freedom in inclusive ways, in our diversity, to seek freedom for humans in partnership with other species and to seek freedom non-violently. This freedom of, and through, diversity is the alternative to globalisation. This is true swadeshi.

# Trusting our own genius

V. KURIEN

SWADESHI to me means trusting our own genius to handle our own problems in a manner unique to ourselves. This is not something that comes easily to a nation which had been colonised for hundreds of years. It is, therefore, tempting to go back to the years before Independence to recall the flavour of swadeshi as people then saw it. It had noble motives. The economic battle was a necessary adjunct to the political battle for Independence. In 1935, two hundred years of living under foreign masters had sapped the economic will of the nation then about to be born in little more than a decade. Swadeshi came to be understood in the spirit in which it was meant only by those who went to the political battlefield for the freedom they so craved.

It was not, unfortunately, understood in the same spirit by others among us who sat on the sidelines and watched. And there were a large number of those too. The supercilious British remark that something was merely 'swadeshi stuff', was meant to indicate inferior quality and was accepted with alacrity by many among us. Unfortunately, it was also often true. Even after Independence the feeling continued that whatever we produced was just not good enough.

Even our own experts were not good enough. So much so that if we wanted to ascertain quality, we sought the opinions of foreign experts. This may be a good thing to do if we do not have the expertise. On the other hand it may not. We faced the problem early in the life of the fledgling dairy indus-

try when the only way to preserve surplus milk was to convert it into powder. Expert opinion was sought from England and New Zealand. We were told in no uncertain terms that it was impossible to convert buffalo milk into powder. Excellent reasons were given to us. Being a rather unreasonable bunch we decided to give it a try ourselves – and we succeeded in converting buffalo milk into powder.

**I** wonder how many today recall the acute shortage of formula baby food in the market in the late '60s. Earlier, in the 1950s, India used to import large quantities of baby food from England. Many of today's middle-aged gentlemen and women grew up on Similac and Cow & Gate. When the baby food imports were slowly turned off after 1956 it took some time for our industry to gear up. It was during this period that we at Amul were told to get the expertise from abroad to produce baby food in India. I was asked by the Ministry of Agriculture to seek collaboration agreements with the world's best baby food manufacturers. When I went to Switzerland and met some of them I was turned down flat. Our Swiss friends said that baby food could not be manufactured in India. For one thing, it required sterile conditions at a level that could never be ensured in India. For another, they could not trust 'native' managers to run the plants and it would be impossible to run a plant entirely with foreign experts in India.

When I returned empty-handed and told my minister what had transpired, he wanted to know what I proposed to do. I told him that since the Swiss were so convinced that it could not be done, and they had excellent reasons, we, who were unreasonable people, would go ahead and produce the baby food for the Indian market. Thus it was that Amul Baby Food

swept the market. It was only then that the Swiss sat up, took notice and sought permission to manufacture baby food themselves in India. What was impossible suddenly became possible. It made us understand that the opinions of foreign experts on any subject of importance to India are dictated by the economic interests of the countries they come from. So long as they coincide with our interests the advice is likely to be valid. If they come into conflict with the interests of the adviser's home country he will offer advice to suit his country's interests, not ours.

There is thus a realistic side to swadeshi. There are many things that we know nothing about. The expertise exists abroad. We should have the understanding to first know what it is that we have no knowledge of and the humility to seek it from another country if necessary. There are many areas, however, in which we have perfectly good expertise, often better suited to our own conditions. We should be able to look for such areas and capitalise on that expertise.

**I**ndia is primarily an agricultural country and it will remain so for a long time to come. There is much to learn from abroad about modern agricultural practices. The knowledge can be brought home and used for our own purposes in whatever manner suits our best interests to raise productivity levels. For instance, capitalising on the Green Revolution resulted in our present day self-sufficiency in agriculture. Similarly, by using foreign food aid for our own purposes, we have today become the world's largest producer of milk. The story is worth recounting because food aid could so easily have led to economic disaster.

When Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Prime Minister, visited us at Anand to inaugurate a cattle feed plant, he was

impressed with Amul and suggested that the spirit of Amul should be replicated in other parts of the country. To that end the National Dairy Development Board was formed. But the mere formation of the Board meant nothing. The Board had no money and none was forthcoming from the Government of India. How then was one to go about replicating Anand in other parts of the country? This dilemma stayed with us for some time. We then noticed that the formation of the European Economic Community had resulted in the guaranteed purchase by the EEC of the agricultural produce of the member-nations' farmers. This included dairy products.

**O**ver the next few years the EEC found itself sitting on a growing mountain of milk powder and butter. Now powder and butter costs money to preserve and the EEC had no market in which it could be sold. It was clear that a lot of the powder and butter had to be simply given away. It could not be got rid of in the Americas. The African nations would perhaps be persuaded to accept some of it, but that would be no more than a pinch here and there. The communist East was out of political bounds. That left just two countries with large populations: China and India. But the Chinese do not drink milk. It was, therefore, clear to us at the Dairy Board that one day some kindly gentleman from the EEC would arrive in New Delhi and offer the Government of India milk and butter as food aid. Had we accepted the food aid and distributed it free to our people, our domestic market for milk and its products would have collapsed. The only way this aid could be used was to channel it through a responsible agency which would use the aid in a proper manner.

The Dairy Board, therefore, offered to accept the food aid on behalf

of the government. We reconstituted the butter and powder back into milk and sold it in the market at a price not below the ruling price of milk. We thus protected the market from collapsing and monetised the aid received. Having done so we used the funds generated to build four large Mother Dairies in the four major metros of the country. That was the beginning of Operation Flood. We created the market for milk in the big towns and then proceeded to set up the cooperatives to supply milk from the rural areas to the urban areas.

**N**obody taught us what to do. These strategies were evolved by our people with our genius. The result is that unlike the Horn of Africa, so devastated by food aid, we have been able to convert India into a country that produces more milk than any other country in the world.

I am all for foreign collaborations in those areas in which we lack the expertise. If we do not know how to make cryogenic engines for our Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, we should get the expertise from abroad. But our native genius is enough to tell us that we do not need foreign countries to teach us how to make fizzy drinks out of coloured and flavoured water and carbon dioxide. Nor do we need foreigners to teach us how to make corn flakes or ice cream. In fact, we make better ice cream in India than do many countries of the developed West.

Besides, it is not true that our own genius cannot solve problems. Take the case of the Cray super computer. After the 1974 Pokhran explosion the Americans placed sanctions on the export of certain 'sensitive' items to India. Among them were super computers. At that time our Meteorological Department was working on models for the forecast of the monsoon, a matter of immense importance to the

economic performance of the country since most of our agriculture depends on the rains. To create realistic models we needed super computers. Since the United States would not let us buy them and nobody else had such powerful machines, the only alternative was to make our own. Our scientists and computer technologists got down to the task and succeeded. Today, a number of countries in Western Europe are lining up to buy Indian super computers because they are just as good as the American ones, they generate less heat because they use parallel processing technology and they cost a tenth of the American Crays.

**R**ecently there was a similar case connected with the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station. The reactor in the station needed a complete overhaul. Since it was made to a design originally supplied to us by the Canadians (CANDU type), the Canadians were approached and requested to carry out the overhaul. They said it would take a long time and cost millions of dollars. The Indian atomic energy establishment then approached the United States and received a similar answer from them as well. R. Chidambaram, (he was then yet to become the father of the Indian hydrogen bomb) then took up the challenge. His team did the job of overhauling the reactor in a matter of months at a cost which was less than that quoted by foreign experts by a factor of twenty.

It must be remembered that no other country owes us a living. It is a jungle out there. We have to live, survive and prosper, in the ultimate analysis, by ourselves and with our own efforts. My personal ideal of swadeshi simply consists of my country never having to look up to anyone else for anything. In essence, therefore, it means having an abiding pride in our own capabilities.

# Interview

with **Adi Godrej**, industrialist by **Ashok Upadhyay**

*What are your thoughts on swadeshi as it is being propounded by the BJP and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch?*

One cannot find fault with a concept that purports to serve national interest; in this sense the concept is essentially, by which one means definitionally, good. The point is how relevant is it to this country's needs at this point of time in its history. To my mind at least the concerns are vastly different than they were when the concept was first invoked. Swadeshi had a deep relevance at the time of our struggle for Independence as a strategic weapon. It united the entire country against an enemy and gave the country's fight a focus. I believed it served its purpose, limited as it was. Intrinsically the concept may still have relevance if you define it as a means to serve the country's interests, to benefit the people as a whole and not some section of Indians. But its application, as it has been historically understood, has grave problems attached to it. This country today needs foreign investment, capital and technology if the country has to benefit as a whole. We should not hinder foreign investment but allow it to come in. But only so long as it helps India grow economically. Of course, the Jagran Manch would say that it is not possible to reconcile the two, that foreign investments would impede growth.

*And would they not be right?*

I would say that they are blinkered to the ways of the world as we see it today. Globalisation is not a phenomenon that you can wish away; the world is far too integrated in terms of capital flows to permit one country to isolate itself from the trend. There is no need for us to believe that we can close our borders to the globalisation that has bestowed such immense benefits on so many developing countries which have prospered as a result. This is what the Jagran Manch people should understand.

*But with foreign investment there is also a threat of domination?*

True and why not I say; if a more efficient company is going to pose a threat to a less efficient one then why stop the inevitable or cry foul so long as the rules of the takeover game are observed. That is not my

worry. My concern is that this country has not provided Indian capital with a level playing field to fight the threat on an equal footing. We are handicapped from the start and that is why the threat of takeover has such ominous overtones. Let me give you an example. Indian companies either in the public or private sector are not allowed to retrench labour. As a result we are burdened with a historical disadvantage when competing with a foreign firm. On this score the latter romps home because it carries a lower cost; at least one component of its operation is already very efficient. As for us, we can do nothing to reduce our costs by introducing new technology if it means replacing labour. Then, of course, there is the issue of buy back of shares; foreign companies are allowed to do that to buttress their position and stake, but not Indian companies. Then again the case of the textile mills in Mumbai, for instance, is particularly bad because they cannot get rid of their debts by selling the surplus land, a factor that burdens them with assets of no use to anyone.

*But aren't you making a case for swadeshi to keep them out?*

No, no I am not asking that the Indian industrialist be *protected*. It's not protection that one wants, like we had in this country for 40 years. What I am asking for are the *enabling provisions*, the removal of the fetters that tie our hands behind our backs. Then we will compete on an equal footing. It is possible that some may die but that is part of the competitive game.

*It all sounds very simple.*

That is the problem; the most simple tasks appear difficult for political parties in power to perceive in terms of a solution. I am not pointing a finger at the present government alone. No previous government since 1991 has looked at the problems facing the Indian industrialist in terms of solutions. To be sure, Manmohan Singh started the process of liberalisation, laying the grounds for the globalisation of the Indian economy. The talk of industrial restructuring began then and continued down to Chidambaram's time and still echoes across the land. But how do you restructure with all the problems that Indian industry faces? Can you restructure your operations without taking a view about surplus manpower?



*Do you think that the BJP with its swadeshi plank can do it?*

I am not sure it can. This government is also a coalition one like the previous ones and I believe that it is as weak in its formation as the earlier ones. The Congress lasted five years, the UF much less. Chidambaram gave us a dream budget but the coalition did not last long enough for him to follow up on the policies he had announced in his first and only budget. If those governments could not make the necessary changes, can this one? I wonder.

*Why not? After all it purports to protect the interests of Indian industry.*

That is the point I am making. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch uses the concept, but it is just that – a concept devoid of any context. It is far removed from the concerns of modern India, concerns that have to do with the need for foreign capital, competition and a level playing field for Indian industrialists. Also, remember, as a coalition it is not entirely its own master.

*You sound cynical or pessimistic.*

Not a cynic but a pessimist yes, but for the short term – not for the medium to long term. The country's fundamentals are strong and our macro management has been very good. We do not face the kind of problems that the South East Asian countries are facing. But you can't expect GDP to grow if the biggest sectors of the economy lie untapped, if the largest assets in this country lie undiscovered of their potential. Take housing. Countries as diverse as Nazi Germany and the USA under the New Deal in the 1930s engaged in housing projects and the attendant infrastructure like roads even though the demand did not precede the development. In China, the basis of the country's phenomenal growth has its roots in the massive inflow of funds into the housing sector. Development there generated demand for other essentials like cement and steel and therefore justified capacities. Surely the Jagran Manch cannot deny the utility of such a development when there are so many of our citizens sleeping on pavements in the metros around the country?

Second, we should open up the insurance sector to foreigners. There is a mistaken notion that they cream away our capital. No, in fact they will help mobilise our savings and therefore boost overall savings and investment in the country.

*But the swadeshi brigade would only want Indian capital.*

Well, you can't dictate things like that; which Indian company would have the resources needed for the sector? You have to allow foreign capital into the country for the housing sector. China did and no one is accusing that country of having bartered away its freedom or sovereignty. We have to be clear that by swadeshi we mean a system or set of policies that are good for the GDP of the country, not for some section of society, be it labour or capital.

*So how do you see 2001?*

That is a decade from 1991. I do not see the country enjoying the fruits of that process begun a decade ago because the transition is not yet over; it has suffered a few setbacks and the current slowdown will take its toll because the upswing may stretch into that year. But, by the same token, I do not think the country will face the kind of crisis it did in 1991 when it came close to being declared bankrupt. So that is all to the good; but the excitement of those early years of this decade is missing and that is a pity because it would be a bad start to a new century.

*Do you think that by then ideology will be dead?*

Well I can't answer that in philosophical terms but I think that concepts like socialism and swadeshi will never die. It seems like just yesterday that the BJP was in opposition as the most vocal and ardent representative of the far right as against the strident socialism of the ruling Congress. Now the tables have turned and the right is in power talks left, a.k.a. swadeshi, and we have the Congress in the opposition as the right with its most vocal factions talking free market. Yesterday, more people in this party swore by socialism; the free marketers were the isolated few. Today it is the reverse. Both have their constituencies even though their numbers tend to fluctuate.

*So what is good governance?*

I am not sure that I can answer that in universal terms. Let me put the issue in terms of economic governance. I think that the sound management of the economy first requires an open mind so as to comprehend the changing world in a more comprehensive way. Global changes transform the definition of national interests and at no time is this change more noticeable than at the present. This is what the Jagran Manch and the BJP must realise, that the nature of national interests has changed and that, in any case, it never meant the protection of sectional interests, be they labour or capital.

# Books

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE: Action Plan for the Economy** edited by Bibek Debroy and Parth Shah. Centre for Civil Society and Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1998.

ACCORDING to the editors of this volume, the programme of economic liberalisation launched in 1991 has all but ground to a halt, partly because economists have failed to communicate the virtues of reforms to a larger constituency that might overcome the lobbies and vested interests that stand in the way. *Agenda for Change* is the first of a series of volumes that two prominent pro-reform think tanks intend to bring out, 'to get across the message of reforms... in clearly digestible language and form' for the general reader. With its large typeface, sparing use of footnotes, and coloured boxes highlighting salient points as well as summary agendas at the beginning of each short article, the book's form gives no cause for complaint. The substance though is another matter.

There are seventeen contributions covering a wide range of issues. Despite this broad-spectrum treatment, there are major omissions. In their belief that external sector reforms were largely on track (the essays were obviously written before the BJP came to power with a swadeshi agenda), the editors did not invite any contributions on policies towards foreign trade (except in relation to agriculture) or foreign investment. Even if the volume was to be confined to

domestic reforms, it is strange that there is no coverage of macro-economic management: apart from suggestions for curbing subsidies, there is nothing here on the government's fiscal deficit and mounting internal debt, or the structure of taxation, monetary and credit policies. Irrigation, health care, and employment schemes are other topics that are not on the Agenda. These gaps would have been less egregious had there not been multiple coverage of several other issues: two essays each on securities markets, labour markets, and controls in agriculture. One of the latter also has much to say on essential commodities and the public distribution system (PDS), on which there are two other contributions. Similarly, the essay on reforms and poverty is substantially devoted to education, which is also the subject of a separate article.

The authors are all more or less enthusiastically pro-reform, but that does not make for unanimity where their essays overlap. Ashok Gulati calls for free trade or uniformly low tariffs in agriculture, while Ramesh Chand supports discriminating protection. Gulati would substantially dismantle the PDS, while Shikha Jha and P.V. Srinivasan prefer to reform it. Shubhashish Gangopadhyay and Wilima Wadhwa call for wholesale privatisation in power and telecommunications, while Suresh Tendulkar more circumspectly groups public enterprises into categories for complete, partial or no privatisation. This could have made for an interesting debate, if not a coherent 'agenda for

change', but the authors do not engage each other's arguments. Critics of liberalisation are not represented in this volume, and only a couple of the contributors address their concerns.

As for the individual essays, a collective volume of this kind inevitably forces selectivity on a reviewer. Ajay Shah begins on a rather peculiar note, arguing that the supply of savings is fixed, and the role of the financial sector is simply to allocate it efficiently. Thereafter, however, he provides a lucid introduction to the world of financial markets and makes a cogent case for institutional reforms involving electronic trading of shares and bonds and fuller information disclosure by companies. Jha and Srinivasan's nuanced assessment of the PDS commends it for stabilizing food prices and preventing localised shortages, but deplores the high costs of maintaining large grain stocks and the programme's failure in targeting the poor. Based on the experience of other countries, they are aware that attempts to restrict access by the non-poor are subject to a high probability of excluding the poor. Given state governments' pathetic record in identifying needy beneficiaries, they suggest modest ways in which self-targeting can be encouraged: provision of poorer quality, simple packaging, and more frequent disbursement in smaller amounts so as to cater to daily wage earners who may never have enough cash to buy a month's requirements at a go.

Gulati, on the other hand, would rather scrap the PDS altogether, replacing it with food stamps issued to the poor which would entitle them to buy from private traders who would be reimbursed by the government. Although he is rightly exercised by the poor targeting of the existing system and the rampant diversion of PDS supplies to the open market, he does not recognize the much greater scope for abuse his scheme would entail. Controls in agriculture, he believes, are routinely evaded and create opportunities for corruption; they should be abolished. Many of his specific suggestions, such as allowing free import of edible oils to replace high cost domestic production and bring down prices are welcome, but clearly run into insuperable political obstacles.

For the most part, though, he bases his case for decontrol on the need to remove 'distortions' and improve allocative efficiency. This means a lot to economists, but will not be self-evident to the general readership this volume is intended for. Neither is the case for liberalisation popularised by his insouciant admission that many groups and regions will lose out in the adjustment process, and that it may take years

for any rise in agricultural growth to become apparent. At the end, he briefly acknowledges that unless tenurial reforms and complementary infrastructural investment are forthcoming, this growth may not take place at all. But then why does Gulati not argue the case for these measures, which require a more activist state, with as much fervour and detail as his case for decontrol and free markets?

Mass poverty and grotesque inequalities of opportunity should surely be the central focus of any Indian agenda for change. Apart from the consideration the poor receive in the chapters on food policy, there is a general complacency about poverty in this volume, an implicit faith in what used to be called the 'trickle-down effect' of growth. In the only essay that deals with economic reforms and poverty, Amaresh Dubey and Gangopadhyay take it as axiomatic that liberalisation creates economic opportunities and growth, which in turn provides the resources for helping the poor. All that is needed, then, is for the poor to be educated to avail of the jobs a liberalised economy generates. Space does not permit me to challenge this syllogism here. Instead, let me question some of their especially misleading 'factual' observations.

Reporting the results of their own research, they show that female-headed households have a higher incidence of poverty than male-headed households in urban areas but not in rural areas, and that female heads of household have lower literacy rates. From this they conclude (reasonably) that urban occupations require more schooling, but also (unreasonably) that gender bias operates in the family more than the workplace. Second, they make the common mistake of noting the fall in the proportion of population under the poverty line between 1987-88 and 1993-94, and attributing it to liberalisation. The earlier year was a drought year, which pushed up the poverty ratio and thus exaggerated the subsequent decline. Further, the annual rate of decline in rural poverty in this six-year period, exaggerated though it was, was actually less than in the previous decade, and also conceals a sharp increase in 1991-92. The reforms have made an undeniable dent in urban poverty, although employment figures suggest that this has resulted from an increase in casual jobs with higher earnings in the service sector.

Finally, while Dubey and Gangopadhyay are probably correct in asserting that land reforms are politically unfeasible (but then so are many of the reforms outlined in this agenda for change), they are less than accurate in citing West Bengal as an example of land reforms not having 'the desired effect soon enough.'

Several observers with no particular Marxist leanings have noted that the limited land reforms undertaken by the Left Front government have blunted the hard edge of rural poverty and contributed to the building of community assets and participation in governance—and to the highest rate of growth of foodgrains output of any state after 1980. The state government's real failure has been in the field of basic education, where socialist governments in Cuba, Nicaragua and Vietnam achieved much more under far more hostile conditions.

West Bengal's disappointing performance in this area is seized upon by Parth Shah in his essay on education policy. Even the most avid liberalisers seldom question the need for state provision of primary education; indeed several contributors to this volume argue that privatisation of loss-making public sector enterprises and the reduction of wasteful subsidies are necessary precisely to free resources for education. Shah goes much further: he believes that the same factors that make the government incapable of efficiently producing goods and services make it incompetent in running schools. He artfully compares West Bengal's predominantly state-run school system with Kerala, that other bastion of the left, where more than half of rural primary schools are private, and almost half the students in private primary schools are supported by the state.

In a novel interpretation of the Kerala model, he ascribes the state's tremendous successes in education to this combination of public funding and private enterprise. He calls for an end to the 'licence raj' in education, and preaches the virtues of 'choice' and 'competition' in schooling, since private schools, like private businesses, will then have an incentive to serve the consumer. He would link school revenues with performance, with grants being based on students' results in a uniform third-standard examination. The mind boggles at the idea of primary education as a business, and in particular at the prospect of eight-year-olds taking an examination which will determine their teachers' salaries. One can well imagine how such 'incentives' will work in practice.

Space does not permit me to comment on the remaining contributions, which include lucid and informative pieces on labour legislation by T.C.A. Anant, intellectual property rights by Bibek Debroy, and environmental regulation by Amir Ullah Khan. On the whole, however, I do not see how this glossy publication can succeed in its professed objective of mobilizing the supposed beneficiaries of liberalisation, among whom the editors include 'unorganised labour,

small farmers [and] the consuming class.' There is no evidence in these essays that the first two groups will benefit; on the contrary they, and the majority of the so-called 'consuming class', will be hit hard by some of the authors' more extreme proposals, such as the dismantling of the PDS, abolition of export controls on foodgrains, and privatisation of primary schooling. Blind faith in the benevolence of state intervention has failed us, but free enterprise and free markets should not be peddled as miracle cures for India's problems of poverty and illiteracy.

**Aditya Bhattacharjea**

**GANDHI'S VISION AND VALUES: The Moral Quest for Change in Indian Agriculture** by Vivek Pinto. Sage Publications, Delhi, 1998.

IN all the recent excitement about *swadeshi* and self-reliance, partly brought on by the current ruling dispensation's professed desire 'to base ourselves on our roots' and even more by its mis-adventure in Pokhran resulting in sanctions, the focus of economic debate has primarily remained centered on the country's external linkages. In an economy increasingly enmeshed with global trade and investment flows, little attention has been paid to Indian agriculture, except to argue that the free trade principle should be extended to this sector as well.

In such an environment Vivek Pinto's slim monograph on 'the moral quest for change in Indian agriculture' decidedly flies against prevalent opinion. Gandhi, more so his *Hind Swaraj*, is hardly a handy reference for the development theorist. To invoke this text as a practical guide for the regeneration of Indian agriculture, and thereby India, is a courageous attempt. Vivek Pinto with his background in theology and formative years spent with two of the country's more unusual voluntary agencies, is not one to evade a challenge.

Friend's Rural Centre, Rasulia and Kishore Bharti, Palia Piparia, both in Hoshangabad district, Madhya Pradesh are best known for initiating the innovative science teaching programme, at the middle school level. This programme, later expanded by Eklavya, was one of the pioneering efforts at environment based learning. What is less well known is that Rasulia, under its then Director, Sudarshan Kapoor, also experimented with Fukuoka's *One Straw Revolution* – naturalist farming which not only eschewed chemical fertilisers, pesticides and high-yielding

variety seeds but also avoided mechanical tilling. Fukuoka, incidentally, reported yields of rice in his native Japanese village comparable to the best in the world. Overall, the philosophy was to nurture nature as the true provider. One is thus not surprised by Pinto's invocation of Hind Swaraj.

'The root meaning of swaraj is self (*swa*)-rule (*raj*). Swaraj may, therefore, be rendered as disciplined rule from within.... "Independence" has no such limitation. Independence may mean licence to do as you like. Swaraj is positive. Independence is negative.' India's development, according to Gandhi, had to be rooted in its agricultural and community oriented endeavours, while adhering to non-violence, truth and love.

Pinto draws upon six key Gandhian concepts – swadeshi, *aparigraha* (non-possession), bread labour, trusteeship, non-exploitation and equality, and shows how Gandhi implemented these concepts in a practical way as rules for those living in his *ashrams*. These he traces to Gandhi's constructive works programmes, efforts which form not just a basis for a moral critique of development (a phrase Gandhi never used) but as a holistic and realisable approach to life and living.

Much of what subsequently follows, both as a commentary on Gandhi's thought and a critique of India's development strategy, is well-known. Of particular interest is Pinto's exposition of J.C. Kurnarappa's survey and subsequent plan for Matar taluka in Gujarat and what went wrong with Gandhi's experiment at Sevagram, Wardha. While going along with the six key concepts as the bedrock to *sarvodaya* (welfare for all), it is somewhat disingenuous to argue that the Sevagram experiment 'failed' because the residents of the ashram were unable to live up to the ideals enunciated.

Gandhi's perennial quest for a true village republic, for India to stand as an alternative to western civilisation remains, at the end, utopian. His philosophical inability to come to terms with humans as they are – brutish, selfish and capable of unmentionable ugliness – has in reality reduced him to a voice on the margins. Nevertheless, many of his ideas continue to find echoes in the continuing experiments at ecologically harmonious, locally rooted community living arrangements. Pinto's pointing out to the spectacular success of Ralegan Siddhi or Seed near Udaipur does demonstrate that even in a macro political economy gone awry, village communities can still construct for themselves meaningful and productive lives – so long

as they can follow self-restraint, treat both the 'other' and nature with respect, and marry ethics to economics. In doing so they live an alternative.

Harsh Sethi

**TWENTIETH CENTURY IMPERIALISM:  
Shifting Contours and Changing Perceptions by  
Rajen Harshe. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1997.**

It would be useless, if not untruthful, to pretend that this will be an objective review. I know the author too well not to have been biased in favour of the book even before I started it. I can recall the numerous conversations we have had over the last ten years, most of them about the state of the profession, its decline and fall.

I have taken my time in reading this book and I don't regret it. It is the best survey and overview of the literature on 20th century imperialism that I have read. Though its focus is restricted to leftist theories of imperialism, the analysis it offers is clear-headed and systematic so that the whole subject is rendered comprehensible, even to a layman or non-specialist. What is more, it offers not only an exposition of the major theories, but also critiques them so that each emerges in a balanced, clear, and orderly manner.

The book is divided into six chapters, preceded by an Introduction. Chapter one, 'Imperialism through radical prisms: a critique' is an overview of the strengths and limitations of the radical approach. This is, perhaps, the most valuable chapter in the book because it offers a summary of the entire field. It begins with Lenin's thesis, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917). In a sense, that became the starting point for all radical views on imperialism in this century. The chapter also touches on Mao's and Nkrumah's extensions of Lenin's ideas. Then the *dependencistas*, or the dependency theorists, are discussed. Finally, the chapter zeroes in on US imperialism which, in a sense, has dominated this century.

Chapter two, 'Neo-colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa', as its title suggests, examines how neocolonialism worked in a specific area. Harshe is an expert on sub-Saharan Africa, having written extensively on it. This chapter locates the postcolonial state in a masterly manner, explaining the dynamics of its continued domination by its former colonial masters. The next chapter, 'Imperialism, intermediate capitalist states and apartheid South Africa', explores what dependency theorists might call semi-peripheral states. South Africa is seen as a prime example of such a 'sub-imperial' state. Other

intermediate states like Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and regional powers like Brazil and India are also sought to be placed in this framework. Chapter four, 'Gramscian hegemony and legitimization of imperialism' shows how the consent of the oppressed is obtained through various systems of direct and indirect coercion and persuasion. The chapter has an excellent summary of the influential and far-reaching ideas of Italy's communist thinker, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci challenged orthodox Marxian dichotomies such as base and superstructure, arguing that the latter is not merely determined by the former, but acts independently, often in very powerful ways. There is an excellent elucidation of the Gramscian idea of hegemony, especially as it can be applied to the discourse of international relations. Chapter five focuses on the erstwhile Soviet Union and the complex dialectic between imperialism and emancipation, the contradictory tugs which the Soviet state both experienced and embodied. But, this chapter appears to be considerably outdated given the fact that the Soviet Union no longer exists.

The last chapter, 'Perceptions on imperialism', not only offers a recapitulation of the major points and position, but also shows the great adaptability of capitalism. As Harshe observes, 'capitalism has demonstrated an uncanny knack of embracing diverse political forms at the superstructure level' (243). It survives and perpetuates itself by unleashing 'combined and uneven development'. It is, in the ultimate analysis, a hierarchical system which promotes 'dominant-dependent ties at several layers' (244). That is what accounts for its omnipresence and omnipotence.

A great strength of this book is the enormous amount of theoretical and empirical information that it absorbs, analyses, and re-presents. The wide range of references does not imply a lack of corresponding depth; on the contrary, Rajen has that rare ability to get to the heart of the matter in a few sentences or so. There is, thus, no flab or fibbing. The analysis is incisive, cogent, and coherent. The manner of writing, too, is not just pleasant but accurate. On the whole, this work should be recommended as a model of how social science scholarship should be conducted and presented.

I do, however, have some criticism to offer at the end of so much praise. I was rather disappointed that the book attempted no original theorising but was content with merely restating and explaining other people's point of view. Rajen's contribution lies in understanding and rearranging already available texts and theories. Next time, I hope he is bolder and ven-

tures to offer his own theories and explanations of how the world works.

I was also disappointed that while the book touched on radical and liberal thinking, it failed to engage with Indian thinking on imperialism. Perhaps this was out of the purview of the book, yet I would have been happy if at least half a page might have been devoted to some alternative ways of critiquing and resisting imperialism which India offered to the world. Gandhi, for instance, is conspicuous by his absence. Gandhi, as we all know, speaks of modern concerns, though not necessarily in a modern idiom. To write a book on 20th century imperialism without taking into account the ideas of Gandhi is to me only a sad reflection of the limits of our own academic discourse.

**Makarand Parajape**

**REASONS FOR HOPE: Instructive Experiences in Rural Development** edited by Norman Uphoff, Milton J. Esman and Anirudh Krishna. Vistaar Publications, Delhi, 1998.

**REASONS FOR SUCCESS: Learning From Instructive Experiences in Rural Development** by Norman Uphoff, Milton J. Esman and Anirudh Krishna. Vistaar Publications, Delhi, 1998.

THE titles, particularly the former, appear somewhat quaint. At the end of the second millennium, to appeal for hope does little to bolster confidence in a people wracked by unimaginable despair. It is not as if it was always so. For many of the years after WW II our world witnessed a period of unprecedented growth, accompanied on the average by dramatic improvements in the quality of living. It is, however, equally undeniable that this period of growth in material prosperity and consumption has also seen escalating inequality, both absolute and relative, between regions and peoples. And though the ideas of democracy and participation, as also a regime of rights backed by international law, have spread, so have terror, violence and insecurity.

We all have our favoured theories to explain the 'sorry' state of affairs. Many of them focus on external forces – colonialism, imperialism, the global market – or on 'lacks' – an other-wordly attitude, insufficient killer instinct, individualism – and what have you as excuses for our relative lack of success. Some among us even seek to foreground our difference, our exceptionalism, arguing that 'we' cannot be judged by criteria applicable to others.

I have a simpler explanation. Our failures, particularly in the developing world, are primarily to do with a distorted priority mix. In an unequal world, groups and communities are hamstrung by insufficient control over resources, both material and cognitive, to take charge over their own destinies. Given proper conditions, under inspired leadership and using proper strategies, all across the world, poorer groups have demonstrated the ability to rework their lives meaningfully. The two volumes under review put together by Norman Uphoff and his associates provide ample evidence in this regard.

Uphoff and his colleagues at Cornell University have for over a quarter century been studying rural development efforts in a comparative frame. One major fallout of their labours has been the demolition of the pop theories of essentialism. These studies have demonstrated that while regions, communities and peoples do have their own specificities, they also share common human aspirations and failings, that there are no 'god's chosen.'

*Reasons for Hope*, the first volume, brings together 18 case studies – from Asia, Africa and Latin America – which illustrate how lives of millions of rural households have been improved by purposeful initiatives. Some of these were initiated by governments, others by NGOs. Some had effective donor assistance, others progressed with remarkably few outside resources. Some were conceived by remarkable individuals, others were the product of team efforts or institutional initiatives.

In all cases, however, success depended on sets of persons who saw acutely both needs and solutions, who persevered as they innovated, bringing in ever-increasing numbers into their programmes. Approaches that respect the inherent capabilities, intelligence and responsibility of rural people, and systematically build upon that experience have a reasonable chance of making significant advances. What is needed are organisational capabilities at local levels that can mobilise and manage resources effectively for the many rather than the few. Novel ideas and strong value commitments that outside resources can support, once a significant learning process has been initiated, is what makes for success.

Many of the cases discussed – the Grameen Bank, the Orangi Pilot Project, BRAC, AMUL, SANSA in Sri Lanka, the work of the Population and Community Development Association in Thailand – are familiar, as are the inspiring individuals behind these efforts. Yet, what makes this collection different from many

others is the *emic*, the insider participant view. Understanding how things happen in the words of those 'who made them happen' can be inspiring; more so since the stories are presented not as self-praise but with warts.

My own personal favourite is the Orangi Pilot Project on the outskirts of Karachi. Akhtar Hameed Khan, earlier known as the father of the Comilla experiment, is genuinely an incredible figure. Having cut his teeth as a civil service officer in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), at an advanced age (he is now over 80) he took on work in a strife-torn immigrant settlement and demonstrated that on extremely low resources urban life in our megalopolises can be improved, of all things through simple sanitation techniques, is a story that demands to be heard. It is another facet that Khan Saheb was in his old age charged by fanatic mullahs for blasphemy, just because one of his poems for children was interpreted by these bigots as insulting to Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet. But the man and the work continues.

The companion volume, a more conventional *etic* account presents the analyst's view of these efforts. It is interesting that the authors/editors hesitated to use the words success and sustainability because they are so often overblown and could prove fickle. The criteria that they favour are well-being, productivity and empowerment – a happy combination of the internal and external.

Each case highlights the importance of commitments, of generating internal resources, the value of learning, of cooperation and participation, of sequential scaling up and of being able to diversify. All through the key factor remains a learning mode – identifying problems and weaknesses, experimenting, evaluating, and modifying. It is this self-critical posture and self-image that conveys an ongoing search for relevance and excellence.

Interestingly the authors do not locate withdrawal as a crucial parameter. I recollect that in earlier times the favoured word, particularly for external interlocutors, was catalyst; that we measured our success in terms of our ability to move out. Uphoff et al. do not see organisational capabilities as finished products that can be walked away from once they are in place and functioning. Relationships may and should change, but they should not snap. Possibly why an Ela Bhatt, V. Kurien, Raj Arole, Anna Hazare and many others continue an association with their efforts, albeit in an altered capacity.

More than the wealth of detail and nuggets of insights which mark these volumes, what is moving is

their tone and temper. For once the focus is not on how many different ways we get it wrong, but how, in the most trying of circumstances, we can strive to get it right. As a cognitive shift, this is crucial, particularly in societies prone to despair. Second, there is no presentation of any magic formula. Different parameters in different combinations work in different situations. Problems may be universal; solutions are context specific.

Finally, a word of advice to ruling regimes. Slogans of *swadeshi* or *swavalambam* acquire content only if the leadership has respect for the people. Learn to listen before preaching.

**Harsh Sethi**

**WAGES OF FREEDOM: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State** edited by Partha Chatterjee. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

THIS collection of reflections by academics on the past fifty years of Indian history provides a richly opinionated study of the country's development, albeit somewhat narrow in ideological focus. Volumes made up of separate contributions by authors tend to be somewhat uneven both in quality and in coverage. This is no different and the number of times the respective authors cite their own work indicates that there is little that is new in their arguments. Notable academics such as Rajni Kothari and Prabhat Patnaik offer chapters on political and economic development that are incisive but will present little that is new to those who know their previous work. Achin Vanaik and Sudipta Kaviraj offer passionate and perceptive accounts of foreign policy and the culture of democracy respectively. There is an attempt to broaden the scope of the book with chapters on art and the cinema, but these are still 'political' in the narrow sense of the word, and written in such a way as to remove any of the colour and attraction of the subject matter that might distract from the analysis. This is a retrospective study written from a contemporary academic perspective, which means rigour takes precedence over readability.

The title of this book is somewhat misleading, for it does not really tackle the concept of India as a nation-state. It is simply taken as given that India is one, and although there is much in the wide ranging and detailed historical analysis contained in the book that implicitly relates to the concept, the suspicion lingers that the phrase has been chosen more for its vogue in political science jargon rather than for any substantive reason.

The construct of the nation-state is a powerful but essentially elusive one. Powerful because of its evocation of unity and legitimacy; essentially elusive because humans define themselves as much by their differences as by their similarities and hence a nationalistic homogeneity is impossible to achieve. The artificialness of the nation-state does not mean it is meaningless, and much of its power comes because it can be invoked so flexibly and with completely contradictory political ends. So nationalism is at once both everyone's friend and everyone's enemy.

What exists is the state, and the interaction between the state and society determines the political health of a country. One's conception of the 'nation' can be seen to be the lens through which this relationship is viewed, which in turn determines how it is implemented in terms of laws and institutions. This inclusive 'nationalism' accepts ideological vision from communism, to liberalism and regional separatism. As such it adds little to one's objective understanding of politics since the 'nation-state' merely becomes what people say it is, but, since ideas do influence politics, much contextual richness is lost without it. Focusing on the nation-state forces one to relate ideology to how the state and society is actually constructed, and is hence useful in providing a practical test of otherwise abstract ideas and ideals.

India is clearly difficult to view in terms of a 'nation' as something above or apart from the state. Most clearly visible is the huge scar of Partition. In her discussion of the formation of a national art collection, Tapati Guha-Thakurta describes an exhibition of Indian art which opened in London in 1947 offering a 'complete, unfragmented display of what would henceforth be arbitrarily divided as the art of India and Pakistan' (91). Such arbitrary divisions are the foundation of all states and the source of the inconclusivity of nationhood. But defining the boundaries of a state does not solve the problem of the nation-state. The final chapter of this book deals with North East India in which Subir Bhattacharya gives a chilling description of the breakdown of state authority amidst competing and incompatible claims of nationhood, and the failure to establish political units which are acceptable to the people. The intractable problem of the nation-state cannot be defined out of existence.

Hence, when, in his introductory chapter, Partha Chatterjee describes the creation of the nation-state as Nehru's most significant achievement, my interpretation is that Nehru was a key player in the consolidation of the Indian state as we see it today, and acted in a



way which was driven largely by his vision of what the nation-state should be. This vision was of a secular democracy with a strong political and economic role for the central government. But, as Chatterjee points out, the implementation of this vision was not a complete success. Taking, as it did, the instruments of state control bequeathed by the British and accepting, rather than challenging the traditionally powerful land owning and industrial interests, there was 'a contradiction between its modernising aspirations and its commitment to democracy' (16).

This limitation of the Nehruvian state is taken up by Rajni Kothari who, in his chapter on the development of the democratic process, notes that the Congress system, 'while allowing a great deal of internal flexibility and a long period of stable democratic functioning, nonetheless produced a centralised, bureaucratic apparatus that was lacking in effective distributive policies and any sound philosophy of justice' (27). And the economic model at the heart of Nehru's modernising vision is denounced in a typically waspish attack by Prabhat Patnaik, at the root of which he places the failure to seriously tackle the issue of land-reform.

The Indira and Rajiv Gandhi periods are passed over rather lightly, seen essentially as a period of decline in which the worst elements of the system were exaggerated at the expense of the best. This seems to me unfortunate, for particularly under Indira it was the increasingly desperate drive to maintain and develop a united national consciousness and concomitant neglect of effective state institutions, that were largely responsible for so many malign and destabilising activities. Here the faults of the Nehruvian state seem magnified; the over-centralisation, dominance of an extra-parliamentary clique, and rhetorical extravagance bearing little relation to what the government was actually doing. It is the period when the Constitution is amended so as to describe India as a 'socialist' country, but when governmental ideology and practice become almost completely divorced. The evidence is of an attempt to invoke a nation-state that does not tally with how society actually operates.

A glimpse of the ethos of the period – the fear, arbitrariness and the confusion between India/Indira – is given in M. Madhava Prasad's chapter on the cinema, describing the excessive censorship during the Emergency:

'*Kissa Kursi Ka* was refused a certificate because two out of five members of the censor board thought it "was derogatory to the democratic situation". The film was about corruption in politics and included

references to Congress politicians. The revision committee's recommendation of a "U" certificate was also overruled by the chair of the censor board who reported the matter to the Central government' (134).

The government seized all the prints, and when the courts sought to view the film it was declared untraceable.

Which leads on to the post-Congress era, and alternative visions of the nation-state that seek to make sense of modern politics and offer prospects for improvement. Is it possible to build a political movement, or develop a cogent vision of the nation-state, which can cope with the diversity and seemingly contradictory requirements of modern India? The difficulties are immense. In her essay on 'Women and Citizenship', Nivedita Menon describes the tangled principles of secularism, religious tolerance and state intervention that surrounds the issue of a uniform civil code. Even for the womens' movement, which has relatively clear goals, the means of achieving them becomes clouded among the contradictory claims of individual and communal rights.

There is little attempt to either examine or criticise challenges to the Congress state from the Janata Party, Janata Dal or BJP, but two chapters focus on the failure of the communist parties. Both of these hardly acknowledge the performance of the communist parties in power, but discuss on the failure to achieve radical or revolutionary success. What unfolds is a tale of a quite outstanding series of misjudgements by the communist leadership. Leaving aside the splits and tactical revisions resulting from divergent and fickle attachments to the USSR and China, the communist leadership denounced and distanced itself from the euphoria of Independence, and turned its back on the JP movement. The CPI gave support to Indira Gandhi when she invoked Emergency powers, and the CPM failed to denounce the Congress instigated anti-Sikh riots in 1984. An incident described by Javeed Alam sets the scene:

'Preparation[s] were made to launch a railway strike on 9 May 1949, which was to be the beginning of a country-wide working class insurrection. This ended in a fiasco. The workers refused to come out; the cadres were jailed. The leadership hit back by purging the middle ranks for not working seriously to make a success of the strike' (189).

Javeed Alam stresses the failure in leadership; Aditya Nigam, in a reflective and perceptive chapter, a more general criticism of the communists failure to

build a deep-rooted movement that reflected the social needs of the people. He recognises the fluidity of the concept of the nation, that 'the entire post-independence period can be read as a constantly threatened and fragile attempt to go on reinvesting in a pan-Indian identity' (229). His regret (and he writes not only as an academic but a CPM activist for nearly 20 years) is about the failure of the communists to respond to this fluidity and fuzziness and successfully mould it into a coherent radical movement, but which instead saw the increasingly explicitly fractured nature of politics as a threat to 'national unity and integrity'.

This raises a question of whether there is a fundamental flaw in the ideology of communism, in its conception of the nation-state. This contends that communism, in overstating the importance of class conflict, fails to have an adequate response to considerations such as regional nationalism or religion. Further, an organisation which seeks to completely overthrow the whole political order and which represents a class who may not even be conscious that what is being done is in its interest, which is only accountable in as far as it achieves a utopian goal and to achieve this end can use virtually any means, and hence can justify almost any change of tactics as in line with its goals, is by nature prone to instability and authoritarianism.

This is undoubtedly putting an unreasonable onus of consistency and unity on the communist parties, nowadays an isolated and soft target for criticism. All parties compromise, change policies and face splits. All parties are in some way vanguards, that whilst relating to society also try to lead it in some particular direction. Nationalist parties like the BJP can also be characterised as utopian, authoritarian and based on false historicism, but this has hardly been an obstacle to electoral success. The failure of the communist parties stems partly from problems with the leadership and other organisational weaknesses, but also from the difficulty in translating their ideology into practical measures. As Nigam argues: 'Hegemony ... can only be meaningful if the party in question is able to address the needs that move the people into political action' (213). This difficulty is by no means restricted to the communists alone.

Kancha Ilaiah offers a vision of the 'Dalitization of the Nation', which Kothari also seems to share, in which politics is transformed through the politicisation and empowerment of the radical, anti-elitist, anti-hierarchical, secular groupings which are emerging and gain power through coalition formation and acceptance of federal politics. This appears to be a call for

liberalism from below, secular and meritocratic, and willing to challenge the traditional structures of society. The hopeful optimism behind this vision is drawn into focus in Sudipta Kaviraj's chapter, which starts off with a lyrical account of India's romance with democracy, but develops into a more cautionary discourse. He emphasises the enduring ability of the social élites to use formal, and increasingly informal processes—language and education—to maintain their dominance. This societal stasis does not preclude change, but limits its scope. In this light he highlights the dangers of popularist movements which are solely reliant on a politics of insubordination, with their tendency to degenerate into reliance on symbolic gestures, and the dangers of the spread of mediocrity in areas where qualitative discrimination is necessary.

Achin Vanaik's assessment of Indian foreign policy provides the most cogent reformulation of the idea of the nation-state. He takes the collapse of the Nehruvian consensus and the resulting 'deep uncertainty and ideological incoherence in ... foreign policy' (61) as his starting point. He goes on to attack both the actors and the theory responsible for India's foreign policy; berating the dominance of the realist approach to international relations, caught up in an Americanised mind-set, and scathing about the 'national security establishment', describing it as 'a disaster' which 'has been utterly incapable of carrying out the kind of self-questioning which is the necessary step towards genuine and radical rethinking, of recognising its own profound limitations as the putative guardians of India's "national security"' (62-3).

His criticism is directed largely at the prevalence of simplistic conceptions of the 'national interest' and 'national security' which in turn lead to a distorted view of the international system as unified states acting in a vacuum. But both the relationship between the state and society and between state and state are far more complex, and inter-relate in a much more interactive manner, politically, socially and economically. Characterising foreign policy as an interaction between 'us' and 'them' is dangerous oversimplification. Democratisation throughout the world has widened the range of groups and interests that the framers of policy must respond to, and this in turn means that foreign policy can no longer be simply outward looking, but must be sensitive to the requirements of the wider population. But here again, he emphasises the dangers of taking a simple dichotomised approach, in this case as 'internal' and 'external'. There is a recognition that globalisation has ended any possibility of isolationism,

whilst rejecting the capitalist/neo-liberal regime as a solution. This leads him to suggest that '[t]he issue has never been whether or not to reform and globalise ... but how to reform and globalise with intelligence and due caution' (76).

Finally, he sets out the principles and agenda of an alternative foreign policy. Written before the BJP came to power and conducted nuclear tests, it is a devastating critique of the path which the Vajpayee government has taken. The appeal of Vanaik's approach is not simply in its coherent critique of the current theory and practice of foreign policy, but the formulation of an alternative which recognises and responds to the diversity and complexity of society and international relations.

Of course, it is easy for academics to criticise politicians, and particularly a Vajpayee Doctrine which seems to be a three stage programme (i) throw crap at the fan, (ii) attempt to clean up the mess, and (iii) blame the fan. But for a politician what value is a coherent view of the nation-state when there are elections to be won and money to be made? Going nuclear was one of the few policies that could be successfully implemented literally at the touch of a button, and although it may have negative long term consequences, it has certainly proved to be instantly popular. Other practical measures for turning India into the macho, pure and self-reliant nation of BJP ideology are not so simple.

An understanding of the relationship between different views of the nation-state and how society is actually formulated helps to cast light on why certain political movements seem to find it so difficult to implement their programme once in power. The cycle of anti-incumbency voting seems deeply established, but the political response has not been to address the problems of governance, but the route of short-term electoral opportunism. Whether the growing acceptance of federalism and coalition politics provides a framework in which this 'anti-politics' can be harnessed and put to positive effect we have yet to see, although theoretical approaches would suggest that log-rolling and rent-seeking are likely to lead to sub-optimal outcomes.

This book casts a disapproving eye over the last fifty years of politics. It is unlikely that many of the authors feel optimistic about the prospects for the next fifty. In its diverse chapters there is much to reflect upon, and in the analysis of the past it offers much that will help us understand the politics of the present.

**Alistair McMillan**

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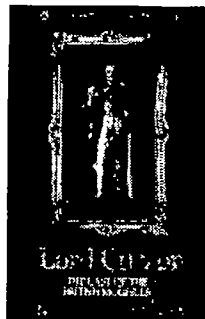
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# Extracts

*Reproduced below is a short article by Mahatma Gandhi, 'The giant and the dwarf' and an 'Interview to representatives of Scindia Steam Navigation Company', which have a bearing on the current debate on swadeshi.*

THE reader's attention is invited to Sjt. Walchand Hirachand's letter published elsewhere. It has undergone some corrections in order to represent my views correctly [*vide* pp. 303-4]. The discussion to which the letter refers arose out of the formula that 'there should be no discrimination between the rights of the British mercantile community, firms and companies trading in India and the rights of Indian born subjects.' The formula reads innocent enough but it covers the most dangerous position.

The situation today is this. The Britisher is the top-dog and the Indian the under-dog in his own country. In the administration of the country, the Indian generally is a mere clerk. In business he is at best a commission agent getting hardly five per cent against his English principal's 95 per cent. In almost every walk of life the Englishman by reason of his belonging to the ruling class occupies a privileged position. It can be said without fear of contradiction and without any exaggeration that he has risen upon the ruin of India's commerce and industries. The cottage industry of India had to perish in order that Lancashire might flourish. The Indian shipping had to perish so that British shipping might flourish. In a word we were suppressed in order to enable the British to live on the heights of Simla.

It was not a mere picturesque expression of Gokhale's when he said that our growth was stunted. To talk then of no discrimination between Indian interests and English or European is to perpetuate Indian helotage. What is equality of rights between a giant and a dwarf? Before one can think of equality between unequals, the dwarf must be raised to the height of the giant. And since millions living on the

plains cannot be transported to the heights of Simla, it follows that those entrenched in those heights must descend to the plains. The process may seem harsh but it is inevitable if the millions of the plains are to be equals of the privileged few.

It is to be feared therefore that before we reach the state of equality, the levelling process will have to be gone through. Justice demands this. It will be a misnomer to call the process one of racial discrimination. There is no such question. There is room enough in our country for every British man, woman and child, if they will shed their privileged position and share our lot. They must then exchange the British army and the force of the cities for the goodwill of a whole nation, which is at their disposal for the asking. Our goodwill is the truest safeguard that we can offer to them and I make bold to say that it will be infinitely better and more dignified for both of us.

In the process there will be apparent discrimination felt everywhere. It need not be felt by those who realise that the present is a wrong and unnatural position. To show that no racial discrimination is involved in this demand one has only to state that Indians who occupy entrenched positions behind their British patrons will also be expected to come to the level of their brethren of the plains. The true formula therefore should be this. In order to remove the existing unnatural inequalities, the privileges of the ruling class and those others who have shared them shall be reduced so as to reach a state of equality between all classes and communities.

On the Indian side it must be a point of honour with us to hold British lives and honour as sacred as our own. This does not, need not, mean the ruin of British trade or interest. Those who are resident can rely on their disciplined habits, trained intellect, great industry and powers of organisation to carve out for themselves careers of distinction all the while serving the country of their adoption with the loyalty they have tendered to their own motherland.

British trade where it is not hurtful to India's interest can be placed, when we reach a state of honourable association, on a favoured basis. And an India free from exploitation from within and without must prosper with astonishing rapidity. With growing prosperity, her wants must grow. With her growing wants, must grow also her imports. If at that time Britain is a partner or ally, she may well become India's chief supplier.

That is a dream I should love to realise. I have been party to the settlement for the realisation of that dream. I seek every Englishman's help to enable India to gain that end. My notion of *purna swaraj* is not isolated independence but healthy and dignified independence. My nationalism, fierce though it is, is not exclusive, is not devised to harm any nation or individual. Legal maxims are not so legal as they are moral. I believe in the eternal truth of *sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas* [use thy own property so as not to injure thy neighbour's].

*Young India*, 26-3-1931  
CWMG, 45, pp. 342-43

4 March 1938\*

THREE representatives of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company had an interview with Gandhiji at Segaoon. They seemed to be worried by the following among a number of things:

1) The discrimination clauses. [In the new constitution under the Government of India Act of 1935.] They cited from Gandhiji's article in *Young India* entitled 'The Giant and the Dwarf' the following statements:

'To talk of no discrimination between Indian interests and English or European is to perpetuate Indian helotage. What is equality of rights between a giant and a dwarf? ...' And again: 'In almost every walk of life the Englishman by reason of his belonging to the ruling class occupies a privileged position.... The cottage industries of India had to perish in order that Lancashire might flourish. The Indian shipping had to perish so that British shipping might flourish.'

Is the shipping not to revive and rise to its full height in a free India?

\* According to *Gandhi - 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*, Shantikumar Morarjee and Gaganvihari Mehta met Gandhiji at Segaoon on this date.

2) What are Indian or swadeshi companies? It has become a fashion nowadays to bamboozle the unwary public by adding '(India) Limited' to full-blooded British concerns. Lever Brothers '(India) Limited' have their factories here now. They claim to produce swadeshi soap, and have already ruined several large and small soap factories in Bengal. Then there is the Imperial Chemicals (India) Ltd. which has received valuable concessions. This is dumping foreign *industries* instead of foreign *goods* on us!

3) Then there are companies with Indian Directorate with British Managing Agents who direct the Directorate. Would you call a company with a large percentage of Indian capital and a large number of Indian Directors or the Board, but with a non-Indian Managing Director or non-Indian firm as Managing Agents, a swadeshi concern?

Gandhiji dealt with these points fairly exhaustively in his reply which may be summarised below in his own words.

1) On this point I am glad you have reminded me of my article written in 1931. I still hold the same views, and have no doubt that a free India will have the right to discriminate – if that word must be used – against foreign interests, wherever Indian interests need it.

2) As regards the definition of a swadeshi company I would say that only those concerns can be regarded as swadeshi whose control, direction and management either by a Managing Director or by Managing Agents are in Indian hands. I should have no objection to the use of foreign capital, or to the employment of foreign talent, when such are not available in India, or when we need them, but only on condition that such capital and such talents are exclusively under the control, direction and management of Indians and are used in the interests of India.

But the use of foreign capital or talent is one thing, and the dumping of foreign industrial concerns is totally another thing. The concerns you have named cannot in the remotest sense of the term be called swadeshi. Rather than countenance these ventures, I would prefer the development of the industries in question to be delayed by a few years in order to permit national capital and enterprise to grow up and build such industries in future under the actual control, direction and management of Indians themselves.

3) Answer to this is contained in my answer on the second point.

*Harijan*, 26-3-1938  
CWMG, 66, pp. 389-90

# Communication

11 August 1998

To:

Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif  
Prime Minister of Pakistan  
and

Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee  
Prime Minister of India

Dear Prime Ministers,

On behalf of more than 200 Pakistanis – scientists, academics, educationists, architects, doctors, editors, engineers, journalists, jurists, lawyers, publishers, teachers, writers, poets, artists, filmmakers, cultural workers, human rights activists, women rights activists, anti-child labour and anti-bonded labour activists, development and environment experts, human resource developers, economists, political workers, students and others – I wish to submit a petition to you against nuclear tests and weapons.

The 28 and 30 May 1998 detonations of nuclear devices by Pakistan, and similar tests conducted by India a few days earlier on 11 and 13 May, pose an incalculable danger and threat to peace and stability in the region. Thus far only the ability to detonate a nuclear device has been demonstrated by both sides. Whether effective delivery systems have also been developed, remains unclear.

If at all these blasts prove anything, it is the horrendous realization that the chauvinistic and jingoistic lobbies in the two countries now have at their disposal the means to inflict irreversible and irreparable destruction and suffering upon the peoples of the subcontinent. The worst imaginable scenario could be that the whole region slips into oblivion in the event of a war involving nuclear weapons, leaving behind enough radioactivity and other lethal agents to menace the health and safety of regions far beyond and for a long time to come.

There is, of course, the argument that the possession of nuclear weapons enhances security and thereby contributes to peace, simply because if both sides possess them then neither can use them with impunity. This is apparently a strong, cold-blooded, rational, argument. However, in the Pakistan-India context it can be shown that such an argument is a bad one. Here are some points to consider:

1. Nuclear weapons may be an effective deterrent against total war, but are useless as a means of preventing small-scale terrorist activities of the intelligence services of hostile countries. It is widely believed that at least since the beginning of the 1980s both sides have been involved in dastardly acts of terrorism against innocent men, women and children. Bombs have been planted in market-places, buses, offices, trains, railway stations and other such places where people congregate in large numbers. As a result, many people have been maimed, killed or simply traumatized. Against this ongoing undeclared war, nuclear weapons are no deterrent. In fact one can suspect that they will only embolden the secret services to intensify their nefarious activities and indulge their sadistic impulses with relish in the vain belief that a large-scale war is now impossible.

2. Low-intensity battles have been going on for years between Pakistani and Indian troops along the cease-fire line in Kashmir. Casualties, including deaths, have occurred on both sides. Nuclear weapons are of no use in deterring such blood-spilling. On the other hand, the assumption that a full-scale war is now impossible may perversely encourage local commanders to accelerate their war games.

3. Nuclear weapons are a deterrent only if the belligerents are in possession of superior technology to monitor the situation and ensure that accidental outbreak of war can be prevented. However, no foolproof technology exists anywhere. As recently as

1995, a stray Norwegian rocket seemingly threatening to enter Russian airspace led the Russian armed forces to alert President Yeltsin. They subsequently determined that the missile was not headed for Russia and called off the alert. As we know, neither Pakistan nor India can claim access to sophisticated technology at present. This greatly increases the chances of an accidental use of nuclear weapons. In the final analysis, nuclear weapons can never guarantee real and lasting peace.

We, Pakistanis (included are persons of Pakistani origin and expatriates), therefore exhort the two governments to seek other ways and means of promoting peace and security. They must focus on the ethical and material well-being of their peoples. It is especially shameful that while the vast majority of the people in these two countries have to wage a daily struggle for survival their governments waste scarce resources on building weapon arsenals. The ancient Indian tradition of *ahimsa* is a part of the common heritage of all the peoples of this region. Many Sufi ideas are also supportive of peace, tolerance and respect for life. The ultra-nationalist and militarist postures of the present regimes, however, negate these humane values. This must change. Relations between Pakistan and India and their peoples should be based on goodwill and a commitment to resolve all controversial issues through discussion and mutual accommodation.

We do not, therefore, find the present policies of the governments of Pakistan and India on defence and security, especially the acquisition of nuclear weapon capabilities, justifiable on any grounds. We also find that the present arrangement that the USA, Russia, France, Britain and China can continue to possess nuclear weapons, arbitrary and flawed. We urge, therefore, the two governments to work towards a global regime dedicated to bringing about the total destruction of all nuclear weapons within a specified period of time, without linking it to their own right to nuclearise. As an immediate step, both countries should declare that they will not embark upon a programme of building nuclear weapon systems.

**Ishtiaq Ahmed** and others

#### CORRIGENDUM

In Seminar (468), August 1998, the article by M. Siddharth, "The legal status of nuclear weapons", footnote 1 on page 69 should be read as Vol. 35 instead of Vol. 25 and footnote 4 on page 71, the number 184 should be read as 166.

## A note from seminar

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# Backpage

THERE was once a time when 5 September, Teacher's Day, was celebrated with some enthusiasm. It is a marker of the times that not only do we no longer remember Radhakrishnan, but we do not remember our teachers except, of course, when they go on strike.

College and university teachers all across the country have (at the time of writing this piece) been on the warpath. They are agitating for the implementation of the UGC recommendations, which offer them not only better pay-scales and service conditions (including promotional avenues) but secure for them a higher relative status. The accent, it is claimed, is on the latter. As one of their leaders recently remarked, 'Our struggle is not for wages, it is for respect.'

It can be no ones case that the academia, including the relatively more secure and privileged employees of the higher education sector, is materially well-off. Even more, as one time students or now parents, all of us are aware of the dismal conditions in our teaching establishments – libraries, classrooms, labs and what have you. To meaningfully engage in the educational enterprise of teaching and learning in overcrowded classrooms, often with apathetic students, is clearly difficult.

Nevertheless, we need to question why the teachers' movement generates so little sympathy. Rarely do our teachers, more so their self-proclaimed leaders, bother to ask themselves why they have lost the respect of their students. Surely, appreciation from those they are trying to teach is somewhat more important than parity with Class I officers in the central government? In no college or university across the country do we have reports of students joining their teachers in the struggle.

Is this partly because our teachers have forgotten that the imparting of *vidya*, like healing, is as much a vocation as a profession? Teachers who seek to equate themselves with *babus* lose out on the specificity of their chosen activity. Just think back as to which of your teachers you remember? The ones who come to mind are often not the most brilliant, or even the most recognised, but those who treat their students with affection and respect, who are concerned about them, who have time for them.

In their preoccupation with pay-scales, perks and promotions (not in themselves unexpected or unjustified) our teachers seem to have downgraded their primary function, teaching. Their unionised movement, divided on party political lines, rarely raises questions

related to the sorry state of our libraries or the unavailability of books or infrastructure that might enable them to infuse greater meaning in their work. Worse, they have evolved no code of conduct for themselves.

Rarely do we hear of teachers pulling up their colleagues for not taking their classes, or demanding that they spend more time in tutorials, that they organise extra-mural activities for their students. Nor have they bothered to resist the steady downgrading of higher education.

Take as an example the best-off of our universities, the ones in Delhi. When a former Vice Chancellor of Delhi University proudly remarks, 'At least, our results come out in time,' it is a clear indication that the standards of self-evaluation have sunk low.

Part of the malaise afflicting our higher education system can be traced to the populist demand of treating it as a right. In the best sense of the term, accessing the university system is a privilege which needs to be earned. This is not to argue that citizens should not be provided the opportunity to continually improve their skills and learning. But to demand the right to be taught at all levels can only lead to a breakdown of the system.

Thus, rather than invest in libraries, less expensive books and learning materials, correspondence and extra-mural courses, our academia collaborates in the demand for a continual and reckless expansion of the higher education sector. The result is inevitably a mushrooming of ill-equipped colleges and universities, with ill-trained and harassed faculty, producing poor quality (and unemployable) graduates.

All efforts by the state to introduce a measure of economic rationality in the system – be it through fee hikes, privatisation, reductions of subsidies – are resisted. So are efforts at instilling discipline and quality – seen only as measures to worsen working conditions. When a bloated, inefficient and highly subsidised sector resists structural transformation, it is likely to be treated with neglect, if not disdain.

All societies look towards their teachers for guidance and inspiration. The teachers' movement in the past has often provided lead in, if not the struggles, the debates for a more democratic and just society. They were heard because they were respected. A measure of self-reflexivity, more than protestations of victimhood, may help them recover lost ground.

Harsh Sethi



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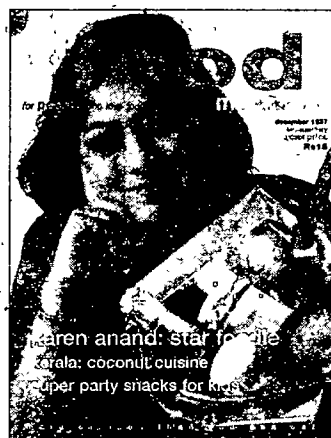
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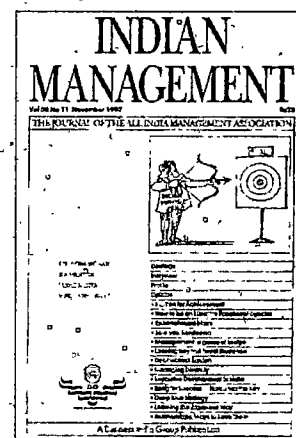
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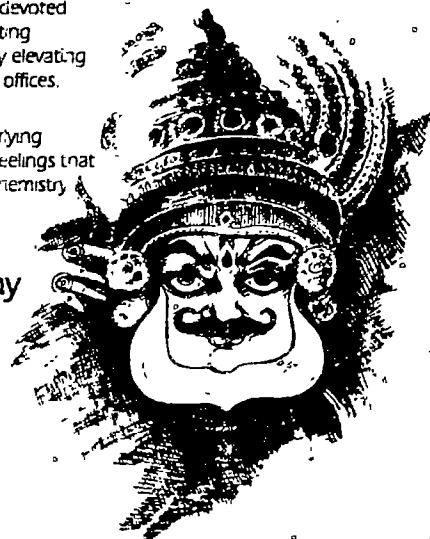
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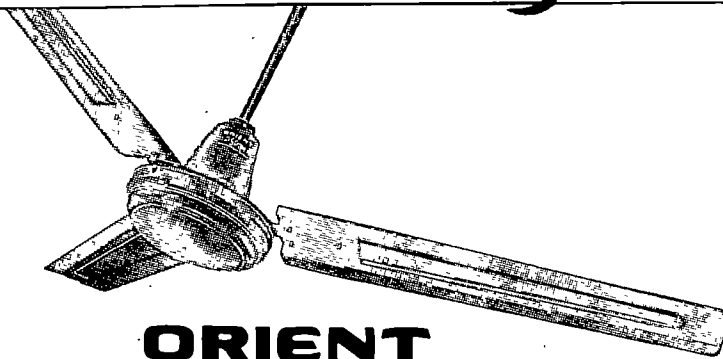
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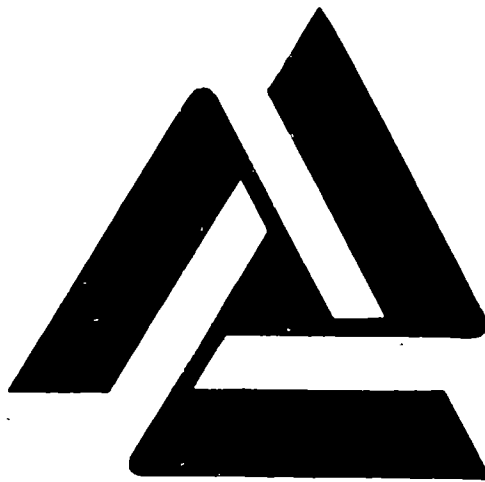
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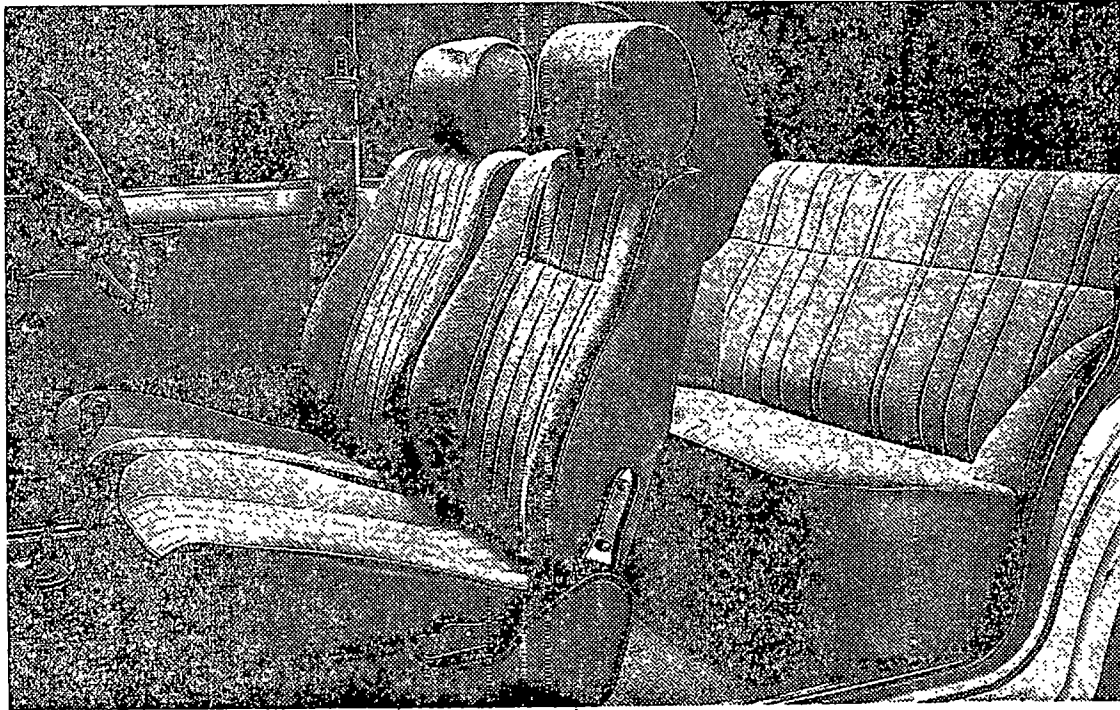
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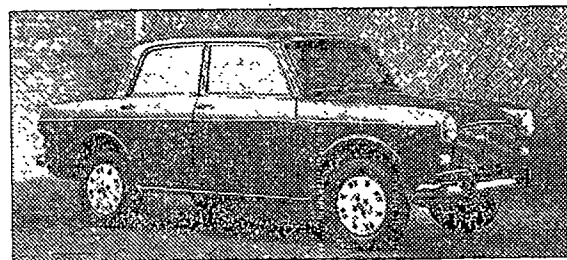
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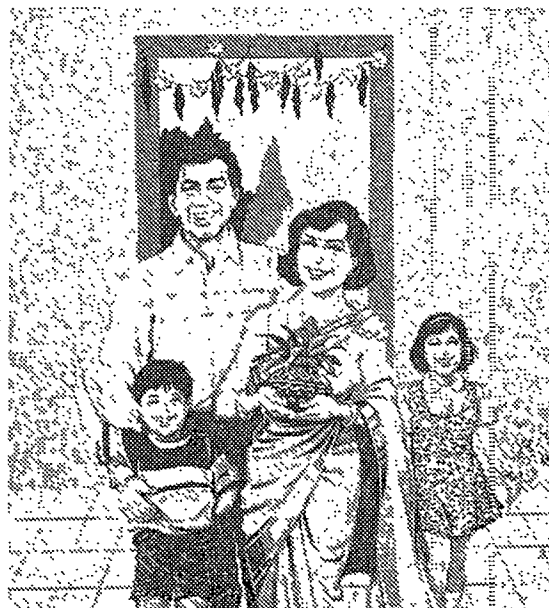
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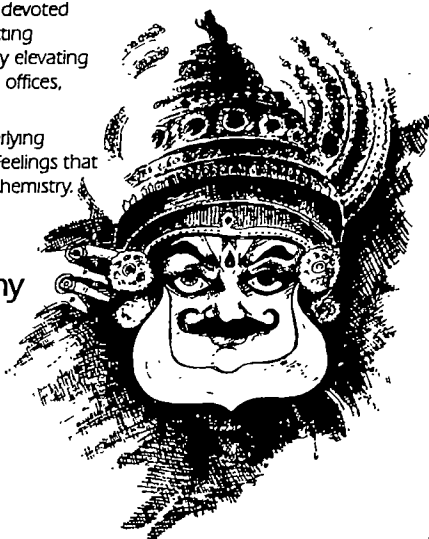
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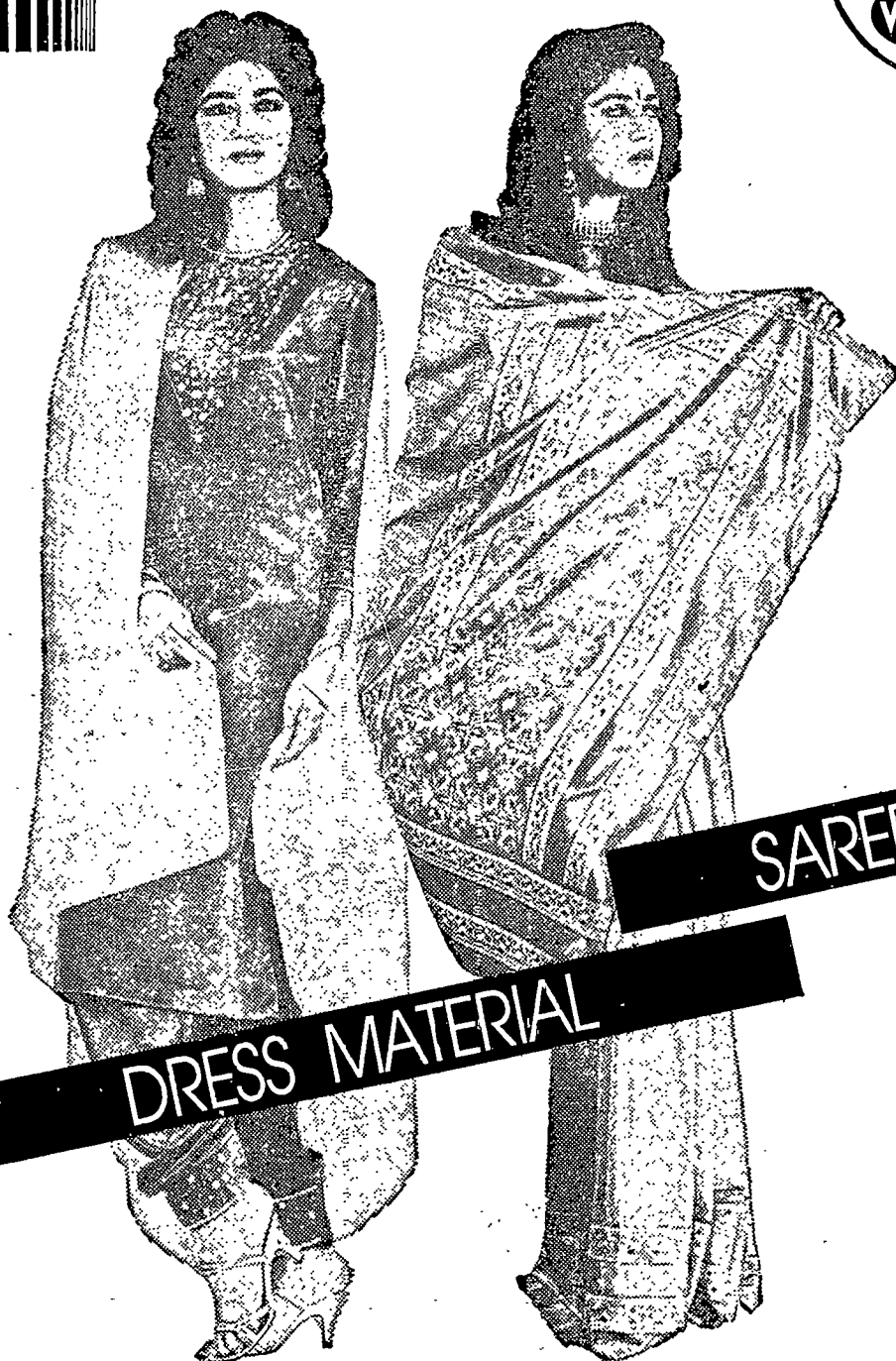
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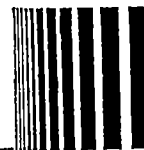
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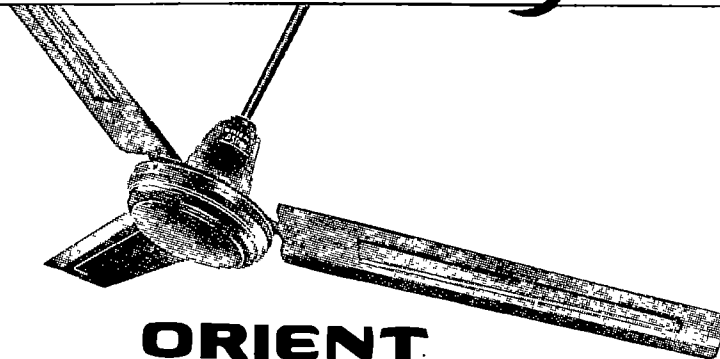
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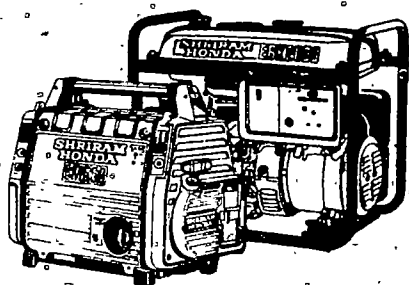
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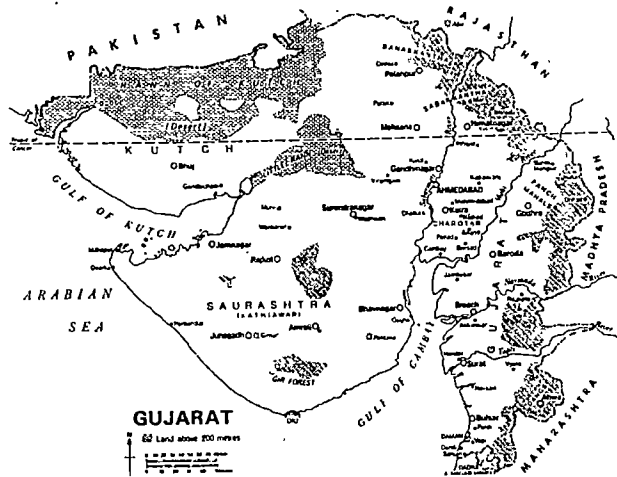
the current trends in an

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symposium participants

- 12 THE PROBLEM**  
a short statement  
on the issues involved
- 14 NOT A NICE GUJARATI TO KNOW**  
Meghnad Desai, Professor of Economics,  
London School of Economics, UK
- 17 AN UNENDING STRUGGLE FOR  
GUJARAT'S POLITICAL SOUL**  
Harish Khare, Deputy Editor, 'The Hindu', Delhi
- 24 ECONOMIC PROSPECTS**  
Pravin Visaria, Director, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi  
and Sudershan Iyengar, Professor, Gujarat Institute of  
Development Research, Gota, Ahmedabad
- 30 POLARISED COMMUNITIES**  
Ghanshyam Shah, Professor, Centre for Community Health  
and Social Medicine, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- 36 ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS**  
Hasmukh Shah, Chairman, Gujarat Ecology Commission,  
Vadodara
- 41 IMAGES OF GUJARATI WOMEN**  
Sonal Shukla, Women's Resource Documentation Centre  
(VACHA), Mumbai
- 47 GARAVI GUJARAT**  
Niranjan Bhagat, President, Gujarati Sahitya Parishad
- 52 EVOLVING ARCHITECTURAL TRADITIONS**  
R.J. Vasavada, Architect, Ahmedabad
- 58 MY MOTHER TONGUE**  
Achyut Yagnik, Coordinator, Centre for Social  
Knowledge and Action (SETU), Ahmedabad
- 63 AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY**  
A dialogue between Rameshchandra Parmar and  
Ashok Chaudhari
- 69 FACTFILE**  
Some selected statistics
- 72 BOOKS**  
Reviewed by Suchitra, Amrita Shodhan,  
B.J. Desai and Harsh Sethi
- 81 FURTHER READING**  
Compiled by Tridip Suhrud, NID, Ahmedabad
- 85 BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Madhu Chowdhury  
of Dilip Chowdhury Associates

# The problem



WHEN looked at from the vantage point of the benighted states of north India, Gujarat comes across as a civilized place. Partly, this is what many of us feel about the India south of the Narmada. All men are addressed as *bhai*, all women *ben*. And all food is sweet, even the *tikha achars*.

The Gujaratis constitute a welcoming people. Outsiders rarely feel out of place. In most major academic/technical institutions located in the state – IIM(A), IRMA, NID, ATIRA, SAC – one comes across outsiders, who often constitute the majority. No Gujarat for Gujaratis, unlike in Shiv Sena’s Maharashtra. No virulent anti-Brahmin movement. No proverbial clannishness of the Bengali. Even the top administrative positions, often sought to be ‘reserved’ for the native, seem open.

It does appear that the political expressions of Gujarati ethnicity remain somewhat muted, at least in relative terms. And this despite the Mahagujarat movement for the establishment of a separate linguistic state. The famous story of how the Zoroastrians, hounded out from their native lands, settled down in Navsari near Surat is reflective of this spirit of accommodation. So is the little known fact that notwithstanding the cultural

memory of Somnath, Ahmedabad reportedly hosts the maximum number of mosques in any city, barring Cairo.

The state and its people claim a tradition of pragmatism – practical and businesslike, adapting easily to new environments. Of India’s many NRI communities, the Gujaratis have done well – in locations as diverse as East Africa, UK and the US. They also display an unusual organisational acumen. From the milk cooperatives of Amul, the associations of informal sector working women of SEWA, to the modern petrochemical complex at Patalganga – there is no dearth of success stories. Why, even Gandhian *ashrams*, now run-down and decrepit all over the country, seem a going concern in Gujarat. Just visit Vedchi.

And yet, not all seems well in Gandhi’s native province. Porbandar, the birthplace of the Mahatma, is a hotbed of criminality and corruption. Its most ‘famous’ resident is a female don, now underground, captured tellingly by Shabana Azmi on celluloid. The walled city of Ahmedabad has its ‘Berlin Wall’ dividing the Hindu and Muslim settlements. The residents proudly show visitors the place from where they stone their neighbours during riots.

As for those who see 6 December 1992 as the darkest day for ‘secular’ India, a visit to the Bohra town of Siddhpur would be instructive. Well before the Babri Masjid occupied public attention, the mosque at Siddhpur (itself on the site of the 7th century Shiva temple of Rudramaal) was razed to the ground. In the ruins, under control of the CRPF, the guardians have consecrated two small Shiva temples. Their major grouse is that they were restrained from completing their task.

Other anomalies strike one. The state has a marked presence of women in civic life, at every level. It is not an unusual sight to come across women moving around freely, even during late hours. Yet, the state matches north India in the incidence of atrocities on



women – particularly within the household – bride burning, female suicides, and a proliferation of amniocentesis clinics. Gujarat has also bequeathed to the country the institution of *maitreyi karar*, contract marriages between rich men and poor women.

Some analysts argue that the formation of the separate state of Gujarat marked the beginning of the end, more so after the split of the Indian National Congress in 1969. That year also witnessed the first of the many communal riots which rocked the state after Independence. Subsequently, the political landscape has been vitiated by the Navnirman movement, major anti-reservation stirrs directed against dalits and tribals, and now the anti-minority campaigns spearheaded by the VHP and Bajrang Dal. Pragmatic politics, unmediated by a civic culture that can accommodate the validity of the other, recognises few limits. The hate campaign run by all the political establishments against the Narmada Bachao Andolan has few parallels.

Evidently, present-day Gujarat has little in common with the nostalgic descriptions provided by K.M. Munshi or the concerned and accommodative spirit of its famed *mahajans*. The early industrialists – the Sarabhais and Lalbhais – were not just enthusiastic supporters of the freedom struggle, they set up major educational and cultural institutions. They also took great interest in maintaining the civic space. The current leading industrial houses, though Gujarati by origin, are often headquartered outside. Gujarat for them remains primarily a business site.

Even the famed organisational ability of the Gujaratis seem to be fraying. Both the Surat epidemic and the recent cyclone that devastated coastal Gujarat revealed major lacunae in the state's capacity to manage disasters. The thousands of NGOs too were of little help.

As Gujarat readies itself for the next millennium, it may well need to re-invent itself. The proud claim of

having attracted the largest amount of private capital, both domestic and foreign, has to be set against major infrastructural bottlenecks. More than power, roads, rail networks and telecommunications, the new complexes, mainly chemical, can play havoc with the fragile ecological base. Most of Gujarat is drought-prone, and indiscriminate use of deep-bore tubewells has pushed the water tables dangerously low. Pollution levels are alarming, and the civic infrastructure has all but broken down.

Even more crippling is the state of its intellectual capital. While the ITIs are reportedly well run, the universities and colleges are marked by an increasingly provincial outlook. The university at Baroda, once famous for its many luminaries, is now known primarily for its school of art and the college of social work. Not quite designed to prepare for a new globalised and competitive environment.

Most troubling, however, is the spectre of industrial and social unrest. Labour-capital cooperation, exemplified for instance by Majoor Mahajan, the textile worker's union set up by Gandhi, is unlikely to work in the new industrial environment. Similarly, the desire to keep the dalits and tribals in their place is under challenge from a new subaltern assertiveness following the anti-reservation stir.

Raojibhai Patel (Mota), a legendary teacher of Baroda University, when exasperated often remarked, *junoo kashu bhulvu nahin, navu kashu shikhu nahin* (don't forget the old, learn nothing new). The danger is that the emerging Gujarat with its provincial, middle class, upper caste Hindu restrictive outlook seems to have forgotten even the old. Without a recovery of its one-time welcoming, accommodating and adaptive culture, the Gujarat of the 21st century is unlikely to be a nice place to know.

This issue of *Seminar* explores these and other questions.

# Not a nice Gujarati to know

MEGHNAD DESAI

BARODA, where I was born in 1940, was a bilingual town. The rulers, the Gaekwads and their relations, spoke Marathi while the bulk of the population spoke Gujarati. The Marathi speaking people, many of whom were friends, co-students and colleagues at various age levels in our family, were called *dakshanis* by us. They all spoke good Gujarati and we knew a few words of Marathi. By 1950 our family moved to Bombay (as it was then called) and we reverted to minority status as Gujarati speakers in a Marathi (but also Hindi, Sindhi, Tamil) speaking city.

My consciousness as a Gujarati has thus been forged in a cosmopolitan atmosphere, all the time tempering Gujarati chauvinism. Had we for example been in Ahmedabad or Surat, I may not have had that advantage. Or indeed had the family stayed on in Baroda itself, my upbringing would have been far more provincial.

My consciousness of being a Gujarati was, of course, like that of many other Indians, filtered through *jati*. Being a Nagar (a subcaste of Brahmins), we had the feeling (right or wrong) of belonging to an elite,

what with many Nagars counted among the literati of Gujarat. Such feelings were stronger while in Baroda but then there was a strong concentration of Nagars in one *sheri* (Chitaniya sheri) of Baroda. We lived away from there but that was the ghetto where the aunts and uncles lived.

A more general consciousness of being a Gujarati came from reading K.M. Munshi's novels. It is hard now to describe what a thrill it was to read *Gujarat No Nath*. Almost everyone I knew in my family circles had read it more than once. I probably first read it when I was seven and then every now and then yet again. Munshi's history of Gujarat is of course a total concoction but I was not to know that then. The sheer power of his style, his ability to build up Patan as some great capital city, the grandeur of his characters – Munjal, Kaak, Kirtidev and Manjari – made me proud to be a Gujarati. The other two books of the trilogy were not of the same class but *Gujarat No Nath* is, in my view, still a world class novel.

This was tempered by other readings. The novelist R.V. Desai was

a great friend of my *nana*, Jayakarlal Majmundar, who was a great influence in my childhood. I often accompanied him on his evening walks which ended up in R.V. Desai's garden somewhere near the Kaptan grounds in Baroda in the early 1940s and then somewhere near Rajlaxmi cinema later. Walking long distances was my grandfather's fancy and I joined him early on. I came to read Ramanlal's novels somewhat later. His style of being a Gujarati was much more subtle, much more socially progressive than that of Munshi. His later novels – *Zanzavat*, *Pralay*, *Balajogan* – were staple readings in the family and they were discussed as well. Ramanlal was almost a Gandhian but with a romantic, socialist streak in his writings. He was a high-ranking official of the Gaekwar Sarkar – a *Suba*. Yet, he found time to write a large number of novels.

**C**ultural activities were part of growing up, partly as an excuse for the young to meet each other and partly so that the Nagars could parade their vaunted superiority. Many I knew wrote in an amateur fashion – plays, short stories, poems and comic pieces. Plays would be staged once a year by the Nagar Seva Sangh which we all had to attend. My sister and brother, who were in their teens while we were in Baroda, probably had more fun than I did.

Baroda was a little gem of a town in those days, not the ugly polluted industrial city it has now become. We lived at a crossroads on Palace road across from the Khanderao market which was properly built up with concrete pavings early in my childhood. There were gardens in front of the market and in the evenings people came to sit there. Baroda Radio was broadcast from the Municipality's buildings in front of the market. The

lights would come on at dusk and illuminate the statue of Khanderao resplendent in his royal military garb. My middle brother would often take me there to play.

**B**ombay was a world away from all this. We first stayed with an uncle in a Dadar *chawl* and subsequently moved to a remote bungalow in Versova in the monsoon of 1950. Finally we shifted to a new government housing colony in Worli. I went to a school in Dadar where the medium of instruction was Gujarati. It didn't function too badly in those days. The school had no proper building and operated from the second and third floors of a small residential *chawl*. In those days Dadar was a predominantly Marathi area, so all of us quickly picked enough of the language to get by.

Yet, the atmosphere of reading and discussion flourished as ever at home. I read other Gujarati novelists – Dhumketu, Petlikar, Pannalal Patel and even G.M. Tripathi's monumental *Saraswatichandra*; also the translations of Marathi and Bengali novelists – V.S. Khandekar, Saratchandra Chatterji and, of course, English novels. Bombay being multilingual, especially Worli, I soon got to know many South Indians and my horizons began to expand. I began to be less and less Gujarati.

When I joined college, I chose Ramnarain Ruia College because my middle brother, the one who took me to the gardens in Baroda, had studied there. Matunga, where the college was located, was very mixed – mainly South Indian but also more Gujarati than both Worli and Dadar. However, in my second year I decided that I would swap Gujarati for Additional English as my language paper. This was a conscious decision to define myself, not as a Gujarati, but as someone more cosmopolitan. It caused a

bit of a stir but then I compensated for this decision by agreeing to help start up a Gujarati wallpaper which we published every term. It was called *Asmita*, showing the Munshi influence after all those years of reading him. Though I was active in theatre, I chose to translate and adapt Ibsen's *A Doll's House* rather than select any standard Gujarati one act play. All this was for the inter-collegiate one act play competition which the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Kala Kendra organised every summer.

**T**hrough that I got to know a few young (though older than me) playwrights such as Tarak Mehta and Prabodh Joshi. Though this strengthened my Gujarati cultural influences, I continued to remain awkward and as un-Gujarati as I possibly could be. I acquired a bit of a reputation for having read many English authors, especially playwrights, who were being scoured for possible translations. In college I made many non-Gujarati friends most of whom were into English or sometimes Marathi literature. I regularly used the British Council library and soon started reading contemporary English writing, sometimes pretentiously so. Names like Aldous Huxley, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice were bandied about. I read Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*. Reading in the Bombay University's superb library, I discovered not only Ibsen but also more esoteric authors such as Andre Gide and Jean Cocteau. I was determined to be as unlike my fellow Gujarati students as possible.

Why this was I don't know. At home we never were *pucca* Gujarati chauvinists in any case. During the Samyukta Maharashtra agitation, as a family we took the view that Bombay, indeed, should go to Maharashtra. As Bombay state stayed bilingual after the linguistic reorganisation of states,

even though the agitation continued, I never changed my mind. When, however, the Mahagujarat Parishad started its agitation I was left without any great patriotic feeling. I remember an uncle asking me when Gujarat state was formed in 1960 if I was going to offer myself to serve Gujarat. I gave him such a withering look that he immediately said, 'For you perhaps even India is too small a stage on which to dedicate yourself.' He was right, but even I did not know then, how right.

The Gujarat I like is the Gujarat of literature, the decent Gujarat. I also like Gujaratis in small doses – family gatherings or a few friends talking together. The Gujarat of money, of religiosity, of pretended respect and love, and of rank hypocrisy in relations I loathe. Large public meetings, readings of the *Geeta* and worship of Swamis I avoid as much as I can, though having now become a semi-public figure, this is getting harder. But then it is not Gujarat alone that is marked by these traits. Most of India is similar. Such encounters I escape from even to this day in London. I am not part of the diasporic scene in Britain. My Gujarati friends can be counted on the fingers of a single hand. I remain as I was all those years ago – awkward.

**B**ut then nowadays Gujarat itself has become ugly. In the 1950s and early 1960s, it was a tolerant, polite, civilised and cultured place. I recall that when I returned to Bombay, the first of many times in 1965, my elder brother showed me notes from a lecture series that Umashankar Joshi had delivered at the SIES college in Sion. They described an eternal, beautiful Gujarat, a gentle, non-violent, inclusive society. Gujarat has over the last 30 years become a nasty, violent, intolerant, communalist place. While Ahmedabad, was once famous as the

seat of Gandhi and Umashankar Joshi, it is now known for anti-Muslim riots. Surat, once a beautiful place, has disgraced itself in the same way. Even Baroda has had its share of anti Muslim pogroms. Of course, there are a few good people who are struggling to maintain sanity – SETU for example, in Ahmedabad. Yet the majority of Gujarat, especially the affluent Hindu middle classes, have so changed that it is difficult to be proud of them.

**G**ujarat is richer in money. Gujaratis all over the world are successful in making money. But of late, especially since the BJP captured the imagination of the Gujarati middle classes, it has become harsh and violent. Of course, in this it follows India. But even abroad the same trends prevail. There are *gurus* and *swamis* who come through London and people display their religiosity with the same fervour that they show for their latest car or music video. Religion seems to have become a consumer durable to be purchased with black money. God is worshipped in large social gatherings, in much the same way as the British go to soccer games on Saturdays, as a consumption display event.

I suppose I shall never be a good Gujarati. I was not one in my teens and I am not now. Yet, I feel that I carry a Gujarat or indeed an India inside me that I would love to live in. It is a gentle, tolerant, cultured place. I knew it once. But then, perhaps it is only nostalgia playing tricks with my memory. Who today would believe that the poet who wrote those memorable lines about there being a Gujarat forever, wherever there dwells a single Gujarati was a Parsee. Perhaps the BJP and the Bajrang Dal will yet agitate to erase the name of Ardeshar Framji Khabardar from the list of Gujarati poets.

# An unending struggle for Gujarat's political soul

HARISH KHARE

Take One: 9 October 1992. Ashram Road, Ahmedabad's busiest thoroughfare. Early afternoon. Shots are heard. One dead. The victim is Rauf Valliullah, a general secretary of the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee. The street talk is that Valliullah had to pay with his life for his audacity. Valliullah was ill-advised to have allowed himself to become the most vocal critic of the then chief minister, Chimanbhai Patel. Inconvenient political rivals could be put away with impunity. That, too, in the much-talked about 'Nayya Gujarat'.

Take Two: 20 July 1998. Campus of the School of Planning and Architecture in the University of Gujarat. A fresh batch of students have arrived on campus; some are getting a taste of the tradition called ragging. All part of a familiar scene this time of the year. Gentle fun; friendly hustle-bustle of old friendships being renewed and new acquaintances being made. Suddenly a posse of 50-60 young men muscle their way in. With the self-assurance of the toughened hooligan; they break-up the revelry, scatter the

furniture and break a few heads. They disapproved of the un-Indian practice of ragging. Inconvenient ideologies and practices can be put down with a rough hand. This too in the newly-promised 'Nutan Gujarat'.

The two episodes, though six years apart, provide a snapshot of the aberrations that tend to crop up as Gujarat copes politically with deep and abiding changes and transformations, economic and social. The old status quo is under challenge by new assertive forces, and the market and technology have permitted the bypassing of the available mechanisms of authority. If there is a quality of unsettledness to Gujarat's political scene, it is only because of a four-decade old agitational habit of mobilization. Every decade has seen at least one major, prolonged agitation; each tapping dormant sentiments, unfreezing a few inhibitions, liberating new forces and groups, culminating in a new collective dynamic vibrancy. The political leaders had no choice but to devise processes and fashion institutions to harness the new vibrancy.

The state itself was born out of a long mobilization, the Mahagujarat agitation, which tapped Gujarati pride; the middle classes joined hands with the business and literary establishments to establish a new state. The 1970s saw the nurturing of the finest civic impulses in the Navnirman agitation, a successful demonstration of 'lok shakti' as student power, youth energy and oppositional forces came together to bring down a corrupt political regime. The 1980s witnessed the anti-reservation agitation, bringing into open the incipient inclination towards social intolerance and at the same time uncorking the suppressed aspirations and ambitions of the underclasses. The resulting clash was violent and remains far from settled. The 1990s witnessed the Ayodhya mobilization, carving out a solid, amalgamated Hindu constituency, pushing the minorities into psychological and geographical isolation.

This tradition of unsettled settledness, with its emphasis on an unsatiated appetite for occupying the opposition space, provides the overarching context to the exacting requirements of governance, with its accent on order, authority and law.

**T**his tradition of dissent, defiance and disagreement has acquired a sanctity of its own, and is forever competing with the obligations of hierarchy and discipline. This tradition of defiance and assertion finds sustenance from two other sources. First, the strong and entrenched tradition of cooperatives, construction activity of the Gandhian variety, the newer non-governmental organizations combining to help preserve an autonomous space of civil society. This habit – by now a paying proposition – contributes to a mindset of non-dependence on the state and its agencies. Civil society in itself has a reservoir of tal-

ent, skills, resources and personnel which could at any time be placed at the disposal of an oppositional movement.

Second, there is a strong streak of anti-Centreism in the Gujarati mind, a hang-over from the struggle against the British. Later perhaps, it became an unconscious legacy of the clash between Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru; the centre being identified with the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, and the Gujarat political establishment owing its loyalties to the Sardar and his political legatees.

Each of the four agitations in the four decades since the birth of Gujarat as a separate state displayed more than a tinge of defiance of the Centre and its perceived nominees in Gandhinagar.

**A** reasonably predictable pattern is discernible in the political developments over the four decades within these overarching contextual trends and traditions. Starting with the Bardoli agitation (1928) and the Dandi march (1930), the Congress captured the commanding heights of Gujarat politics. While the Bardoli agitation established Vallabhai Patel's reputation as a great party organizer and earned him the title of Sardar, it also marked the beginning of a wonderful infatuation between the Congress and the resourceful Patidar community, especially in the central and north Gujarat regions. This relationship matured into a full-fledged matrimonial affair during the heyday of the Sardar. Jawaharlal Nehru never enjoyed much of a following in the region – a historical fact that came to have a bearing on later developments.

The reorganization of the states in the mid-1950s along linguistic lines left Gujarati sentiment unmollified. The Mahagujarat Parishad unleashed and mobilized powerful sentiments across Saurashtra, Kutch, and the Gujarat regions. Morarji Desai as

the chief minister of the combined Bombay state was seen as betraying the Gujarati cause. By August 1956, the Gujarat region was up in arms against the apparent unwillingness of the Congress leadership – national and regional – to grant a separate state of Gujarat. When Jawaharlal Nehru arrived in Ahmedabad to 'talk sense' to the Gujaratis, the fiery Indulal Yagnik organized a parallel meeting; the prime minister was left fuming and had to address a rather thin congregation.

Soon the Mahagujarat Janata Parishad, a front of various anti Congress, pro-separatist Gujarat forces, was formed in September 1956 to contest the 1957 elections. The second general elections saw the Congress rebuffed in the north and central Gujarat regions; the Congress lost two out of the four Lok Sabha seats from north Gujarat and three out of the seven seats in central Gujarat to the Mahagujarat Parishad. The Congress leadership could not ignore the writing on the wall, and a new state of Gujarat came into existence on 1 May 1960.

**T**he struggle for a separate state of Gujarat had inculcated new political habits which could not be easily shaken off. The Saurashtra region did not exactly vibe with mainland Gujarat, and from the very beginning tension between Jivraj Mehta (the first chief minister) and Balwantrao Mehta was all too palpable. The central leadership was reduced to taking sides, sometime with one faction and sometime with the other. Morarji Desai, always ambitious and mindful of the next battle for national leadership, was understandably keen to have his supporters and his say in the affairs of the new state.

At the same time, when the 'Congress system' arranged a merger of a faction of the socialist leadership

(the Ashok Mehta group) with the Congress, it brought new talent—and a new faction—into the Gujarat Congress; senior political figures of the Praja Socialist Party like Uttambhai Patel, Jaswant Mehta, Ishwarbhai Desai, Narsinh Makwana and Chhabildas Mehta joined the Congress. The socialists, with their characteristic penchant for elaborate factionalism and petty bickering, merrily fanned the factional intrigues and infighting in the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee.

**T**he involvement of the central leadership in the affairs of the state was both sought and resented by the state-level factions. Morarji and Nehru, the former quite openly, found themselves on opposing sides in the factional warfare that erupted from the very birth of the new state. The conflict of loyalties was to find its severest expression when the Congress party split at the national level in 1969. The impact of this split was probably more fundamental in Gujarat than in any other part of the country. Inevitably, this factionalism made the Congress unequal to the challenge that was posed by the newly formed Swatantra Party (a loose alliance of the rich farmers, urban industrialists, feudal princes, and a few retired bureaucrats).

Politically, Gujarat too could not remain immune from the gathering anti-Nehru, anti-Congress feeling in the rest of the country, especially in the aftermath of the India-China border debacle. By the end of the 1960s Gujarat was unconsciously slipping into the anti-Centre mood. The massive communal riots in Ahmedabad in 1969 and the failure of government to bring the situation under control, resulting in more than 1,500 deaths, provided the first indications of how political degeneration could take its toll on the efficacy and efficiency of the state administrative structure.

Even after Indira Gandhi established her supremacy in the Congress at the national level, the Gujarat Congress could not overcome the factional bitterness. Indira Gandhi's use of radical rhetoric of social change and economic empowerment of the have-nots merely provided a figleaf of respectability to wanton factionalism. Her much-fabled control and conflict-management skills proved of little use when it came to restoring a modicum of order among her own partymen in Gujarat. The native urge to disregard and defy central control kept alive the factional bush fires. Indira Gandhi's nominee for the post of the chief minister, Ghanshyam Oza, had to eventually make way for the local entrepreneur, Chimanbhai Patel. In turn, the Chimanbhai Patel regime found itself totally grounded when it tried to cope with the Navnirman movement.

**T**his movement itself was a response to Chimanbhai Patel's rough administrative tone and tough political manners. The turning point came when Chimanbhai Patel used his clout on behalf of a crony, Ishwarbhai Patel, to defeat the much respected Umashanker Joshi in the contest for the post of vice chancellor, Gujarat University. No other single incident brought to surface the clash between the political representative of the new prosperous Patidar community and the old 'cultural' establishment which still thought of Gujarat in liberal, enlightened terms. The eruption of student protest and its eventual channeling into a wider political movement trapped Gujarat in an existentialist dilemma.

By the time the movement was finally defanged during the Emergency, a rough edge had entered the Gujarati political soul; the political class, across party lines, found itself

in a sullen, angry and embittered mood. More than the individual resentment, the political community, as well as the business leadership and the educational establishment, had lost its sense of ideological, intellectual and moral anchorage. At one level the Navnirman movement tapped the finest civic impulses; at another, it also saw the beginning of the brutalization of collective morals and manners.

Above all, the Navnirman movement, the experiment in internal emergency, and the flirtation with variations of the Janata Party played havoc with the party system. Organisational loyalty, obedience and discipline took a beating, while personal ambitions and egos acquired a new acceptability. Leaders could change positions, parties and pretensions overnight, without inviting any popular disapproval or parliamentary rebuke.

The next clash came in 1980-81 when the status quoist establishment discovered to its horror that its complacency and divisions had allowed a new political coalition to capture governmental power. The Madhavsinh Solanki-Jinnabhai Darji-Sanat Mehta trio devised and improvised a caste-based coalition of the have-nots—a grand alliance between four numerically dominant communities: Kshatiriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims (KHAM).

**T**he ensuing rhetoric and politics was organised to engineer a grand divide between the KHAM alliance, and the upper castes of Patels, Banias, Brahmins and Rajputs, all of whom were the erstwhile unchallenged beneficiaries of the existing terms of political exchange. The KHAM yielded rich electoral dividends for the Congress; Madhavsinh Solanki became chief minister (and eventually became the first and the only chief minister to

have completed a full term of five years in office).

The Solanki regime came to power with a promise to change the terms of political exchange to the advantage of the hitherto disadvantaged sections. There was some resistance in the form of the 1981 anti-reservation agitation, but unequivocal support from the Centre, by way of political backing and additional para-military forces, enabled the Solanki government to ride out the storm. Nonetheless, the forces of status quo had served notice, but so preponderant was the Congress legislative majority that the status quoist forces had to bide time till the ruling regime began making mistakes. Meanwhile the Solanki regime did initiate a few pro-poor schemes like the mid-day meal scheme, food-for-all project and so on.

For all its pretensions of ushering in a new social order, the Solanki regime soon turned out to be an essay in tokenism. The regime's real energies and policies were hijacked by the industrial lobby; Solanki wanted to replicate a mini-Japan in Gujarat and he invited the industrialists' cooperation. Entrepreneurs could manage concessions in policy, tax breaks, and land at throw-away prices for the asking.

The balance of sympathy and policies did not tilt dramatically in favour of the have-nots. Nonetheless the KHAM rhetoric ensured that the upper castes were comprehensively alienated from the Congress. The fact that land ceiling laws, even if unimplemented, continued on the statute books angered the rich farmers. Democratic changes in the cooperative laws earned for the Congress annoyance of the entrenched interests.

On the other hand, the habits of factionalism developed during the decades of the 1970s continued to dis-

tract the Congress leadership from administrative coherence and political purposiveness. The one consolation for the Congress was that the opposition forces too had incurred infirmities in terms of organisational discipline and norms, and, therefore, were in no position to mount any effective challenge.

The slide gathered momentum after Solanki led the Congress to an unprecedented second consecutive victory in the 1985 assembly elections. Even before the results were declared a disheartened and disorganised opposition had lit the fires of yet another anti-reservation agitation, this time protesting the reservation granted to the Other Backward Classes (as identified by the Bakshi Commission). When the Congress won 149 seats in an assembly of 182, the forces of status-quo had nothing to lose except their newly created marginalisation. The culture of restraint had vanished.

The anti-reservation sentiment was unabashedly fanned by the Gujarati press, the alienated but resourceful Patel community, the RSS and its front organizations. The agitation soon degenerated into a communal confrontation. Political and electoral preponderance did not help the Solanki regime to best the anti-reservation voices; it became a clash between the numerical majority and an entrenched minority. However, when push came to shove, the Solanki team was found lacking in administrative vigour and political innovativeness to defeat the agitation. After the police revolt and the attack on *Gujarat Samachar*, the Solanki regime had lost its moral authority, if not legitimacy.

Meanwhile, the mantle of central leadership of the Congress had passed onto Rajiv Gandhi, who was fashionably and bluntly unsympa-

thetic to any notion of social engineering. Consequently, when the Solanki regime ran into rough political weather a second time, it received no support or solace from the Centre. Instead, Arun Nehru, the second most powerful man in the Congress, was keen to oust Solanki and to install a pliable chief minister of his choice. Evidently, the gathering impression that the chief minister had lost the confidence of the new, modern, elitist Rajiv Gandhi-Arun Nehru-Arun Singh ruling combine in New Delhi emboldened the anti-reservationist leadership to sustain its agitation.

The new chief minister, Amarsinh Chaudhary, quintessentially answered the Supreme Court's later-day phrase of 'creamy layer'. A tribal by birth, an engineer by training, and a political coward by inclination, Chaudhary based his chief ministerial stewardship on three principles: blind loyalty and servility to the central leadership, a systematic dismantling of the social engineering agenda of the Solanki era and a surreptitious relationship of compromise with the same forces that had opposed the Solanki agenda. Administrative indecisiveness, political vacuity and moral lapses came to characterize the chief minister; Congress factionalism increasingly became rampant and intractable.

Consequently, notwithstanding its brute majority in the state assembly, the Congress government was ill-prepared—mentally, ideologically and administratively—to combat the two major agitations launched by the RSS-BJP-VHP and other Hindu fundamentalists in the second half of the 1980s. Gujarat, in fact, became the first laboratory for the later-day Hindutava experiment. A befuddled and divided Congress watched helplessly as the Hindutava forces began invoking religious figures and tradi-



tions, symbols and festivals for consolidating the Hindu constituency. For the first time in 1986, Ahmedabad witnessed a procession (expectedly through sensitive areas) on Janmashtami. The stand-off between the police and the organizers of the Janaki rath only added to a growing alienation of the Hindu community without helping the Muslims acquire a sense of security.

Throughout 1986 and 1987 and till the middle of 1988, army and paramilitary forces had to be pressed into service as communal riots and violence erupted in towns, big and small, across the state. A thoroughly biased police force proceeded on the assumption that the only way to bring violence to an end was to give the minorities a taste of state repression. The communal divide was complete; the collapse of state authority was total. The Congress' secular credentials stood devalued. In the first electoral contest after the communal violence, the BJP captured the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, while Abdul Latif, a prominent bootlegger, won from five municipal wards with a preponderant Muslim electorate.

**P**arallel to this agitation for Hindu consolidation, the BJP leadership launched a farmers' agitation under the aegis of its front organization, the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, for a regular supply of electricity at subsidized prices. Though the rich farmers dominated the movement's leadership, it captured the imagination of the middle and small farmers as well. The farmers' agitation made the BJP and the Janata Party/Janata Dal groups and its off-shoots realise for themselves the advantages of political cooperation.

The Ayodhya movement and the farmers' agitation totally re-worked the political geography of Gujarat. The

KHAM coalition was broken up and trounced as the two agitations helped the BJP blunt the appeal of caste in favour of the Hindu community. They also brought about a harmonization of the rural-urban divide. The stage was set for a total rejection of the Congress in the 1990 assembly elections. An uneasy Janata Dal-BJP coalition assumed office in Gandhinagar under the redoubtable Chimanbhai Patel, who soon fancied himself as '*Chota Sardar*'.

**B**y November 1990, the coalition broke down as L.K. Advani set out on his *rath yatra* towards Ayodhya as an antidote to V.P. Singh's Mandal initiative. And though Chimanbhai Patel remained delightfully vague whether he was for or against the Mandal package, the BJP simply could not keep his company. Like a jilted lover, Chimanbhai Patel wooed and won the hand of Rajiv Gandhi's Congress; the support extended to the Chimanbhai Patel ministry from the outside was a total and final negation of the KHAM politics of the 1980s.

The BJP now exclusively occupied the entire opposition space. The finest moment of the BJP's political strategy came in the 1991 Lok Sabha election for the Patidar dominated Gandhinagar constituency. The BJP fielded L.K. Advani, while the Chimanbhai Patel-Congress combine put up a Patel candidate. The chief minister personally took charge of the campaign against Advani, raising the slogan of 'P for P' (Patels for Patel); the BJP tasted the heady efficacy of its kisan and communal mobilizations to overcome the appeal of caste. Advani's resounding victory provided the BJP, both in Gujarat and nationally, with its winning formula. Advani and other BJP leaders were convinced of the moral superiority

and political potency of the Ayodhya agitation.

Gujarat was offered a choice between the BJP's promise of wholesome governance based on the principles of Hindutava, and the Congress record of sordidness based on the corrupt script of Chimanbhai Patel. The Congress was now supping with the very devil it had fought in every village and city *pol*. While the totally amoral footwork did help Chimanbhai Patel to survive in office, and eventually to worm his way back into the Congress, the partnership did not in anyway add to his political acumen and administrative capacity to cope with the communal onslaught on the Indian state. In December 1992, Gujarat witnessed greater fury and more deaths than Uttar Pradesh, the epicentre of the Ayodhya movement; the collapse of the state and its moral and administrative authority was total.

**T**he administrative infirmity was only a minor part of the larger suborning of the Indian state from within; the Chimanbhai Patel-H.K. Khan combine was seen as countenancing every single illegal impulse and practice, as long as the price was right. But a weak central leadership was unable to take any corrective steps. In Gujarat the chief minister ensured that all his adversaries and detractors painfully learnt the advantage of the old adage that discretion is a better part of valour. Hence, Rauf Valliullah's cold-blooded murder.

Chimanbhai Patel's revenge on Gujarat came to an end only through divine intervention; he succumbed to a massive heart attack in February 1994. He was succeeded by the entirely colourless and eminently incompetent Chabbildas Mehta, who was totally unequal to the task of taking on the BJP and its unrelenting organiza-

tional and communal mobilization. Under the combined organizational energies of Shankersinh Vaghela and Narendra Modi, the BJP penetrated the tribal areas, co-opted the Harijan leadership, and held on to its traditional support base in urban and semi-urban areas. To no one's surprise it trounced the Congress in the 1995 assembly elections. The resounding success brought in its train its own crop of problems – just as the Congress successes in 1980 and 1985 had produced intense intra-party tensions and conflicts.

Though the BJP's vote in the 1990, 1995 and 1998 elections suggest that Gujarat had become saffron country, the party itself could not remain immune to the Chimanbhai Patel variety of amoral political habits and practices that had become fashionable and respectable in Gujarat's political discourse. The BJP central leadership could not summon the necessary skills of conflict-resolution to arbitrate between the ambitions of Keshubhai Patel and Shankersinh Vaghela. The 1996 split, the eventual installation of Shankersinh Vaghela as chief minister, and the ultimate rejection of Vaghela's Rashtriya Janata Party in the 1998 assembly elections are episodes in the larger saga of gradual but steady erosion in Gujarat's party system.

**W**hat are the emerging parameters of Gujarat politics? First, political exchange is increasingly taking place without the benefit of the old 'genteel' structures and influences that once mediated between the antagonists. This is most vividly evident in Ahmedabad, the epicenter of political turmoil and change. The traditional business families of Ahmedabad, the Lalbhai, Sarabhais and others, no longer wield the economic clout they once did; as the textile industry floun-

dered, the mercantile aristocracy increasingly lost its traditional interest in the quality of civic life. Of late there is a recognition of the need for the business community to take an interest in civic life and there are some feeble signs of involvement. But for most part of the 1980s and the 1990s the political class had to sort out its conflicts entirely on its own.

**S**econd, a decline in the influence of the traditional textile industry is matched by the rise of other entrepreneurs in the petroleum and pharmaceutical sectors. Reliance, Nirma, and the Torrent groups are representative of the new and raw entrepreneurs. Except for protecting its narrow policy and commercial interests, the new industrial class has shown little inclination to intervene in civic and political life. The downstream impact of this new entrepreneurs has not been entirely wholesome. The last time the entire business community joined a collective battle was in 1990 when Chimanbhai Patel goaded the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce to lend its financial and organizational resources to his battle against the Baba Amte-Medha Patkar-led Narmada Bacchao Andolan.

Third, the new capitalistic ethos has gradually eaten into the traditional accent on austerity and non flamboyant lifestyles. The participation of women in vulgar dancing in wedding processions on the street, disco *garba*, a rash-like eruption of country clubs (which are nothing more than respectable gambling dens), the encouragement of drinking as a fashionable mode of socialization and so on, have put a premium on a certain kind of lifestyle which the younger members of the political class finds difficult to resist. The new capitalistic ethos of making money – by hook or by crook – has gained new adherents as rural

society too undergoes comprehensive transformation. The growing numbers of the wealthy rural elite, enjoying the fruits of cash crops like sugar and cotton and a new prosperity has produced the phenomenon of international migration. All this has combined to bring about a uniformity of tastes and biases, of cultural habits and political preferences between rural and urban Gujarat.

Fourth, this economic and cultural churning has contributed to a brutalization of civil society. Gujarati newspapers have added their bit to the coarsening of public discourse in every sphere of civil society. The police and other agencies of the state have succumbed to the temptation of brutalization. The police force itself revolted twice in the 1980s; a sub-inspector assaulted a chief judicial magistrate in Nadiad. The police-criminal nexus is nowhere more evident than in Ahmedabad where bootleggers reportedly have a greater say in the transfer and posting of policemen than the Director General of Police. The elimination by the police of criminals like Raju Risaldar in 1992 or Abdul Latif in 1997 in fake encounters are two prime examples of this brutalization of collective political manners and biases.

**F**ifth, there is a marked decline in the quality of leadership as buccaneers have pushed out the older set of leaders. The state once boasted of tall leaders like U.N. Dhebar, Jivraj Mehta, Balwantrao Mehta; of leaders like Hitendra Deasi, Ratubhai Adani, Jeenabhai Darji, Madhavsingh Solanki, and Sanat Mehta. Today, all that the BJP has on offer is a second-rate *moffusil* leader like Keshubhai Patel. The decline in integrity and competence apart, the new breed of leaders lack moral authority and stature, a deficiency which makes the task of

governance much more complicated. The other agencies and institutions – the judiciary, bureaucracy, cooperatives, NGOs, trade unions, business community – simply cannot be expected to display the requisite degree of trust and respect when dealing with the political leadership.

Finally, there is a virtual collapse of the party system. The BJP is desperately trying to enforce centrally-dictated discipline and hierarchy. Chimanbhai Patel completely devalued the party organization and instead relied on the Patidar community for mobilization and support. Shankersinh Vaghela has been dealt with, but the Vaghela virus is now rampant in the body politic. The Congress is reconciled to an unhappy balance between the 'high command' and local initiative; for example, the Ahmedabad-based political leadership succeeded in defeating the central preference for an electoral understanding with Shankersinh Vaghela's Rashtriya Janata Party. This collapse of the party system will continue to play havoc with discipline and loyalties and will produce periodic turmoil in the state's body politic.

**G**ujarat appears to have tilted towards a two party system, though there still is a sizeable chunk of political opinion and loyalty available for mobilization beyond the BJP and the Congress. Since the Congress won 55.5% of the popular vote in 1985, no political party has re-established its majority among the electorate. In 1995, the BJP share was 42.5% which increased only marginally to 44.3% in 1998. The Congress share has remained reasonably stable: in 1990 it came down to 30.5%, increased to 32.8 in 1995, and to 35% in 1998. However, the third force cannot be wished away. In 1985 the Janata Party got 19% of the vote; in 1990 the Janata

Dal got 29.3%. But in 1995 when the Janata Dal and the Congress merged, the 'independents' cornered as much as 18.7% of the vote-share. Similarly in 1998, the third force, the Rashtriya Janata Party of Shankersinh Vaghela, garnered 11.5% of the vote.

**T**he struggle for Gujarat's political soul continues. The choice before the state is to find an optimum mix of its national heritage, the globalising instincts of its international connections (the overseas Gujaratis), and its regional pride. Though Vaghela's Rashtriya Janata Party has been shown its place, it is too early to argue whether the Vaghela sentiment has been adequately dealt with. Recently, this sentiment was articulated as a clash between the glory of Gujarat and the distant, removed leadership based in New Delhi. A BJP document notes: 'He (Vaghela) believed that any person blemishing the glory of Gujarat and behaving immorally towards women should be debarred from the party. If his party (the BJP), instead of punishing the guilty, punished him and expelled him he would not sit idle and suffer humiliation. He roared like a lion, like the great Indulal Yagnik of yesteryears. His challenge broke up the BJP.'

The BJP's answer to this appeal was to crank up an imagery of *Bharat Mata*. With its considerable gift for innovativeness, the BJP has used every traditional avenue to equate Hindutava with Bharat Mata; for example, it recently experimented with the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations. Predictably, however, this push for an overarching national perspective has often degenerated into ugly communal manifestations. If Gujarat can discover the creativity and enlightenment to blunt such communal appeals and tactics, it may then initiate a new trend in the national polity.

# Economic prospects

PRAVIN VISARIA and  
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GUJARAT is a highly urbanized state, second only to Maharashtra, from which it was separated on 1 May 1960. Both Gujarat and Maharashtra were, during 1956-1960, part of the former bilingual Bombay state (which was created to demonstrate the possible benefits of large multi-lingual states). During the British rule in India, large parts of both the states constituted the former Bombay Presidency. Relative to Maharashtra, Gujarat is small in terms of both area and population. With an extensive common border, Gujarat and Maharashtra have strong links with each other and both are grouped among the more progressive and relatively developed states of India. There is often a subtle competition between the two and they tend to emulate each other's policy initiatives.

Gujarat accounts for only about 5% of India's population and for about

6% of the geographical area of the country. The average density of population in the state (215 per sq km) is a little lower than the national average at 230. This is so because it includes the second largest district of the country, Kutch with an area of 45,652 sq km, which is largely uncultivable and covers the famous large *Rann* or desert in the north and the little Rann in the east. Kutch forms 23% of the total area of Gujarat and has only 3% of the state's population. Its exclusion would raise the density by 26% to 266 per sq km.

An assessment of the economic progress of Gujarat has to begin by recalling some elements of its history. First, Surat, a historical town of south Gujarat located near the mouth of Tapi river, was for long the seat of the English factory and the administrative headquarters of the East India Company during the 17th century. The

silting of Tapi led to the decline of the town and the Company's headquarters shifted to Bombay. However, the people of Surat and its environs developed and maintained close links with Bombay, which became and continued to be for almost a century the headquarters of the presidency named after it.

The railways in India developed during the 1850s and the first train originated in Bombay. The ensuing decades connected Gujarat as well and made it a part of the hinterland of Bombay. (The current Western Railway used to be called the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway or the BB&CI.) The trading community in Bombay was drawn largely from Gujarat and a large number of migrants engaged in white collar or services sector in Bombay came from Gujarat. These historical links between Gujarat and Bombay have been too strong to be severed by the formation of a separate state of Gujarat.

**S**econd, large parts of Gujarat were for long ruled by the erstwhile native states or princes. Saurashtra (or Kathiawar) included in its area of a little over 57,000 sq km, 14 salute states, 17 non-salute states and 191 other small states exercising varying degrees of jurisdiction. (The scatter or dispersal of territorial rights led to the division of the area of Kathiawar into about 860 different jurisdictions.) Elsewhere, there were 17 full jurisdictional states and 127 semi jurisdictional and non-jurisdictional units (which had a total of 271 shareholders). These states included some ruled by progressive princes such as Baroda, which along with the other 'Gujarat states' were merged with Bombay province.

The small area of Dangs was parcelled among 14 chiefs (13 Bhils and one Kokani) and was made a separate district of Bombay province; the

same arrangement was made for four states of Rajputana agency (Palanpur, Danta, Idar and Vijaynagar). As a part of the integration of these states with the Indian union, the Kathiawar states were merged into a united state to form Saurashtra, and the border state of Kutch (or Kachchh) was made a separate Chief Commissioner's Province. These arrangements continued until 1 November 1956, when the bilingual Bombay state was created and included all these parts of what today constitutes Gujarat. (For details see, V.P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*. Bombay, Orient Longman, 1961.)

**T**he feudal past of large parts of Gujarat had created a status-conscious, caste-ridden, hierarchical society, in which most rulers and their followers constituted a largely parasitic class. A democratic polity has, therefore, been rather difficult to establish in some parts of the state. The legacy of the past continues to haunt the present generations and contributes to problems of establishing and maintaining the rule of law. While these problems are not openly discussed, such discussion is vital for evolving a more integrated society, with a consensus about its goals and the adjustments to be made to promote equity along with a merit-based efficient system that also recognizes the inexorable market forces.

Third, while the long coast line of about 1500 km facilitated extensive contacts between Gujarat and Persia, East Africa and the rest of the world, the niggardliness of mother nature with respect to the natural resource endowments of the region stimulated a search for greener pastures. It is unclear whether and how far the feudal social setting encouraged the rebellious and the innovative to move out and try their luck elsewhere. However, over large parts of Gujarat,

rainfall tends to be scanty and erratic. Average rainfall in Gujarat is about 833 mm, with only 3 of the 19 districts having a rainfall of 1000 mm or more. Large parts of Saurashtra (except parts of Junagadh) and Kutch are known to be arid or semi-arid regions, with frequent droughts.

Over the 25 years between 1970-71 and 1995-96, in 12 years the output of Gujarat's primary sector declined over the previous year because of inadequate rainfall. In such years, not only are the human needs for foodgrains met through imports from other states, but grass has to be transported over long routes from the rest of Gujarat and neighbouring states. Even more critical is the need to transport drinking water for human and animal consumption through tankers. The seasonal migration of Maldharis and their families from the northern dry districts to south Gujarat is a common sight along the highways of Saurashtra and central Gujarat.

**A** logical consequence of periodic droughts and seasonal migration is the acceptance of mobility of labour as a means of survival and economic progress. It has broadened the horizons of the people of Gujarat and the traditional resistance to crossing the seas in search of higher incomes was overcome a long time back. The resulting exposure to the lifestyle of the developed and western world has influenced the preferences about housing; the demonstration effect has also led to efforts to improve the infrastructure of educational and health care institutions in the towns and even the villages of Gujarat. The remittances from abroad and other parts of the country have made Saurashtra and Kutch 'money order' economies, in which the surpluses have been invested not only in agriculture (particularly irrigation and pumpsets or

tractors and trailers) but also in small scale industries.

Over the 25 year period since 1970-71, the state domestic product (at 1980-81 prices) has grown at an average annual rate of nearly 5%. With population growing at the rate of 2.1% over this period, the per capita state income has risen at the rate of about 2.9% and has registered a growth of about 106%. This is not a bad record in view of the fluctuations in the fortunes of Gujarat's agriculture. As a result, Gujarat has come to occupy the fourth rank (after Punjab, Maharashtra and Haryana) among the more populous states with respect to per capita state domestic product.

**D**espite the poor performance of agriculture in Gujarat, the income growth has been above average because of the state's drive for industrialization. The number of working factories has risen from 5,544 at the end of 1970 to 16,810 at the end of 1994; the average daily employment in these factories has almost doubled from 4.4 lakh to 8.1 lakh. The number of registered small-scale industrial units (SSIs) in the state has increased 10-fold from 15,879 at the end of 1970 to 178,627 at the end of 1995.

In fact, the growth of both large and small and medium industries has made Gujarat the second most industrialized state in the country after Maharashtra in terms of the per capita gross industrial output or value added in industries. The decline of the cotton textile industry has meant a sharp fall in the production of cotton cloth from the peak of 1388 million metres in 1980 to only 266 million metres in 1993. However, the state has seen a rapid development of the chemical and other industries. It accounts for a significant share of the national production of salt, caustic soda, fertilizers, sulphuric acid, as well as petrochemicals.

Growth of industrial production has been facilitated by a 15-fold increase in the installed capacity for the generation of electricity from 333 MW in 1960-61 to almost 5,000 MW during 1992-93. Actual generation of electricity has increased almost 18 fold from 1.3 billion KWH to 23.0 billion KWH over the 32-year period. The number of electrified villages has increased from only 823 at the end of 1960-61 to 17,985 at the end of 1991-92; electrification was considered 'not feasible' in the remaining 129 villages.

This has been achieved despite the limited scope for generating hydro power. There are few perennial rivers in Gujarat. The construction of a large dam on the Narmada and the harnessing of its potential for hydro power have been bogged down in controversy for an inordinately long period. Coal has to be transported over long distances at a high cost; and as a result, thermal power is the main and an expensive source of electricity for the region.

**T**he discovery of oil around Ankleshwar in Bharuch and Kalol in Mahesana, as well as the offshore oil and natural gas reserves in Bombay High has mitigated this general paucity of minerals in the region; and some entirely gas-based power plants have been commissioned or are being planned. With known reserves of 158 million tonnes of petroleum (almost 20% of the national figure), Gujarat contributed about 6.3 million tonnes (19.5% of the national total) to the country's crude oil production during 1994-95. Also, against estimated reserves of 93 billion cubic metres of natural gas, it produced about two billion cubic metres of natural gas during 1994-95 (about 14% of the national production). On the whole, however, the scarcity of resources

has been a major factor in influencing the nature of development in Gujarat.

**A**lso, except for oil and gas (both on-shore and offshore), lignite in Kutch, limestone in Saurashtra, and bauxite, Gujarat has rather limited mineral wealth. Of course, Japan has demonstrated that the local resource base is not a decisive determinant of the level of development of a region. Resources can be imported and with international trade acting as an engine of growth, the process of value addition can lead to the development of a country or a region. The paucity of natural resources also tends to influence the make-up of the human factor and somehow often endows the latter with an innate capacity to overcome the challenges of a constrained environment.

While the social psychological underpinnings of this hypothesis need to be supported by well-focused interdisciplinary research, casual empiricism suggests that both the Marwaris of Rajasthan and several groups of Gujaratis from Saurashtra and Kutch have responded in an exemplary manner to an inclement nature with a remarkably high level of entrepreneurship. They have minimized the effects of imbalance between human and natural resources through out-migration to regions with better resource endowments (both within and outside the borders of India) to raise their own level of income and to plough back a part of their savings into the development of their motherland. Several developments of the post-independence period seem to suggest and support this observation.

The advocates of 'bilingual Bombay' had in 1956 argued that the separation of Gujarat and Maharashtra would lead to an exodus of Gujarati capital from the latter and slow down

its development. The fear has not been confirmed by actual events. The Gujarati entrepreneur, to a large extent, has not found it either necessary or advisable to move to Gujarat. Over the years, many Gujarati entrepreneurs have indeed set up their factories in and around places like Vapi and Umargam near the border with Maharashtra. However, most of them prefer the cosmopolitan life of Mumbai, with the anonymity of a megalopolis, to living in Gujarat.

**A**n important factor contributing to this process has been the impression of a decline in the standards of education in Gujarat since adopting Gujarati as the medium of instruction in schools and universities. This decision was taken on the presumption (highlighted in Gandhian literature, without adequate empirical support) that education through mother-tongue would help develop the creative faculties of young children. However, Gujarati entrepreneurs, seeking to establish links with the rest of the world through migration and/or periodic training or visits, find the medium of regional language an unnecessary constraint and have educated their children in English-medium schools and colleges both in and outside Gujarat. A former chief minister of the state was reportedly told by industrialists, whom he was trying to woo to set up industry in Gujarat, that their staff did not like to move to the state because of their perception of a relatively low quality of educational and health infrastructure even in metropolitan cities (with more than a million population).

The results of this unwillingness of Gujarati capital to move out of Maharashtra on a significant scale are evident in the composition of investments made in the state over the past few decades. A detailed study of the subject is yet to be made and it is a

moot point whether Parsis should be classified as non-Gujaratis. However, non-Gujarati capital has indeed moved to Gujarat; and the groups operating in different parts of the country (the Tatas, Birlas, Ruias, the Raunaq Singh group, the Dalmias, as well as multinational groups such as ABB) have set up industries in the state. Among the 30 companies with total estimated sales of Rs 200 crore or more during 1995-96, three were central government concerns (Indian Oil, ONGC and IPCL); three were joint sector companies set up partly with share capital invested by the Government of Gujarat (GSFC, GNFC and GACL); and two were cooperatives producing fertilizers with capital invested by the farmers themselves (IFFCO and KRIBHCO). Among the 22 private sector firms, the well-known Gujarati industrial groups such as the Lalbhai, Sarabhais and Mafatlals have been joined by new companies such as Nirma (Karsanbhai Patel), United Phosphorous (Raju Shroff), Pidilite (Parekhs), and Gujarat Ambuja Cement (Nevatia).

**I**n addition, the Gujarati leadership was called upon to help build the financial infrastructure for industrial growth throughout the country. It included the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (chaired by G.L. Mehta, H.T. Parekh and Siddharth Mehta for many years) to assist the private sector industries as well as the Unit Trust of India (headed by R.S. Bhatt and Surendra Dave), which mobilized funds for investment in the capital market. Besides, Dhirubhai Ambani, more than anyone else, successfully demonstrated the feasibility of mobilizing a large volume of funds from individual investors for growth industries such as Reliance.

As of February 1997, about Rs 71,196 crore of investment in

manufacturing activities was on hand in Gujarat, over two-thirds of it in the chemicals industry. The figure was higher than for 16 other major states with a population of five million or more; it formed almost 16% of the national figure for manufacturing investment. This investment includes a major petroleum refinery being set up by the Reliance group in Jamnagar and other chemical units of the same group as well as the Essar (Ruia) group around Hazira in Surat district. These are capital intensive industries and except during the construction phase their impact on employment may not be significant. However, the additional demand for consumer goods and services created by income growth and the growth of ancillary industries would indeed augment employment.

**I**nterest on hand for infrastructure (such as power or energy, transport, irrigation, finance, communications, education and health) was, however, higher in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. As a result, Gujarat's share in the all-India investments on hand came to 10.4% of the national figure of Rs 1171,549 crore and it ranked third after Maharashtra and Karnataka. This situation partly reflects the fact that compared with Maharashtra and Karnataka, Gujarat already had a better relative level of infrastructure development in 1993-94 than the country as a whole. However, compared to Punjab, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Haryana, Gujarat still has a long way to go towards improving its infrastructure. (For details, see, *Profiles of States*, Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, Mumbai, March 1997.)

Of course, the term 'investments on hand' is somewhat tentative. While for 60% of it, the projects were already being implemented, 27% was in the

'proposed' category and 13% had only been 'announced'. Some of the plans and proposals could undergo change in the light of subsequent developments, including political uncertainty or the recession affecting Indian industry over the past several months. Yet, it is important to note that, until recently, Gujarat had sent a part of its savings out to other parts of the country by way of subscriptions to the primary issues of equity and debt. In March 1996, its credit-deposit ratio for scheduled commercial banks was 53%. While some analysts criticize this situation as reflecting a diversion of the state's resources to other areas, it probably reflects the relatively lower demand or need for bank credit in Gujarat than in other states; and should lead to higher returns for the investors in Gujarat.

**T**he industrialization in Gujarat is a natural response to the relatively limited scope for agricultural growth. Over the past 50 years, successive governments have tried hard to raise the area under irrigation by constructing dams wherever possible. The percentage of gross cropped area under irrigation has risen from about 10 to 29 by 1993-94, but remains below the national average of 35%. Also, about 78% of the net irrigated area in Gujarat receives water from wells, whereas the corresponding national figure is only 53%.

The cropping intensity index or multiple cropping during 1993-94 in Gujarat was 114, compared to the national average of 131. Tractorisation has proceeded to give Gujarat the fourth rank (after Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh) with respect to the number of tractors per 1000 hectares. The number of pumpsets in use has also grown rapidly although Gujarat occupies the eighth rank among major states. Overall, as a result of the vari-

ous developments, power consumption in agriculture in Gujarat during 1993-94 was 812 KWH per 1000 hectares, next only to Punjab's 832 and more than twice the national average of 379.

**A** major change in Gujarat's agriculture has been the shift to commercial crops such as groundnut, cotton and tobacco, which accounted for almost 42% of the area under principal crops during the triennium ending 1994-95; the national figure was only 12%. This shift is consistent with the general spread of monetization and the ascendancy of a culture of economic valuation of alternatives in Gujarat. However, it has led to over-exploitation of the underground water resources of the state. This has resulted in a sharp decline in the water table not only around the metropolitan cities such as Ahmedabad but also the districts of Mahesana and Banaskantha in north Gujarat and in Saurashtra and Kutch.

Areas near the coast also face acute problems of ingress of sea water, which will have adverse implications for both agriculture and for meeting the human needs of drinking water. The draft on water resources far exceeds the rates of natural recharge and the state is likely to face an acute water shortage, which is a vital resource for not only agriculture and industry but also for the very survival of human beings. The state needs to promote extensive use of all water-saving devices such as drip irrigation, recycling of water and de-salinisation. Despite some welcome indications of watershed planning to construct bunds and other means of harvesting rain water, there is insufficient recognition of the gravity of the problem.

The most important challenges facing Gujarat are likely to lie in the development and management of

human resources. First, Gujarat has a much higher proportion of scheduled tribes (15%) than the country as a whole (8%). Most of them are located in districts and talukas on the border of Gujarat with neighbouring states. While many of them have over the years moved markedly towards joining the mainstream of development and have not remained isolated from the more developed districts, special efforts need to be made to improve their access to avenues of social advancement such as schooling and education, particularly for their girls and women. The problem is not limited to the supply of facilities. Every village and every habitation or hamlet within a village, has a primary school within walking distance. However, a demand for schooling remains to be created and the young as well as their parents need to be convinced about the advantages of attending school. Second, the quality of schooling and education in Gujarat needs to be improved to match the has of a state with an ambition of being a centre of industry.

**T**he traditional links of Gujarat with Bombay and the rest of the country have weakened insofar as the number of Gujarati students migrating to Bombay for education has declined. More students probably go abroad in search of higher education and the return rates among them remain to be studied. However, if Gujarat is to emulate Japan as a state that compensated for local resource scarcity through trade, it must build a strong knowledge industry. The efforts in this respect seem to be weak. Not only are the literacy rates and student population ratios in Gujarat (reported in the Factfile) lower than those in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu (though higher than in the country as a whole), but the quality of educational attainment leaves much to be desired.



Some other areas of concern merit attention. There was a time when non-Gujaratis faced no problem in moving to Gujarat. This climate of open hospitality helped industrial development. Today, there are ominous symptoms of intolerance that are likely to prove counter-productive for a state that sends out a substantial number of migrants. These symptoms are reflected in numerous recent incidents, which may have a much larger impact than appreciated by those involved.

Economists talk of a widely observed Gresham's law, according to which 'bad money drives out good'. Once the confidence and reputation of a group or a state is destroyed, it is difficult to rebuild it. Therefore, compromises on such issues could be dangerous. A group that seeks free or easy entry into other states or markets cannot deny to the others access to its own territories without serious consequences, even though out-migrants or emigrants are not noticed whereas in-migrants are indeed seen. Gujarat is bound to gain from free movement of labour and capital and must not do anything that would jeopardize continued free movement of the factors of production.

**A**mong other developments, the rate of population growth in Gujarat, which exceeded the national rate, has declined significantly during the 1980s. Fertility (the average number of children born to a woman over her child-bearing period) has dropped from more than 6 to between 3 and 3.5. The effect of this remarkable change on the rate of population growth is not yet visible because of the simultaneous drop in the death rate. Infant mortality has dropped from more than 225 deaths per 1000 live births to about 60-65 during 1995-96; and the average lifespan probably exceeds 60

years. This figure is much lower than the 72 years estimated for Kerala and there is no reason why Gujarat cannot improve its performance in this respect by promoting some relatively simple measures to provide basic health care to its population.

**A**ccording to the current official projections of population, Gujarat will achieve replacement level of fertility during 2011-16. Total population is expected to grow to 49 million in 2001, 56 million in 2011 and 59 million in 2016. Our own long-term projections envisage a somewhat smaller population of 58 million by 2021 which is expected to stabilize at about 68 million in 2076 and after. Only time will tell whether we are being over-optimistic about the feasible pace of social engineering in Gujarat. However, given enlightened leadership, a state that produced not only the apostle of peace and non-violence but also the iron man of India who integrated more than 562 native states into the Indian union, can certainly muster the necessary strength to achieve the welfare and development of a people endowed with an intrinsic strength to withstand the paucity of natural resources.

A factor that should help this process is urbanization. The considerable growth of transport and communication facilities throughout the state is a welcome development, and many of the large villages can be reclassified as towns. During the 1951 Census, Saurashtra was the most urbanized state of India, partly because the seat of each princely state was classified as a town and often shared some urban characteristics. The 1961 Census declassified 74 towns of Gujarat and treated them as rural, while it also added 14 new towns to the list. As a result, urbanization appeared to have slowed down between 1951-61 though it remained above the all-India level.

Since 1961, the number of towns in Gujarat has increased from 181 to 264. Nearly two-thirds of the urban population in 1991 lived in 'cities' with a population of 100,000 or more and only 10% in small towns with a population of less than 20,000. However, as in the country as a whole, about 70% of the growth of urban population in Gujarat during 1981-91 was a result of natural increase of the population already resident in urban areas in 1981 and net rural-urban migration accounted for only 20% of the growth. (The balance 10% was a result of reclassification of areas from rural to urban.) As one looks ahead, by about 2021 nearly 50% of the total population of Gujarat will indeed be resident in towns and cities (whose number is expected to rise partly through reclassification).

**I**t is therefore imperative that Gujarat should initiate urgent steps to improve the living environment in the urban centres, even as it tries to better the rural living conditions. The living conditions in several cities are appalling and just as Surat has reportedly been cleaned up, a well-coordinated programme needs to be initiated in other cities, towns and villages. Gujarat has the non-governmental organizations as well as the tradition of initiative and local-self government that should help to realize these goals.

As the fortunately short-lived plague epidemic in Surat city during 1994 demonstrated, the cost of neglecting urban infrastructure are high and can bring the entire country to the brink of isolation from the rest of the world and interrupt all trade and commerce. Issues of sanitation, health and hygiene in towns and villages cannot be ignored, except at high risk. As the father of our nation had repeatedly suggested, a clean environment forms

the very foundation of development and must receive the highest priority in our planning efforts. Over the past 50 years we have ignored the sound advice of Gandhiji and need to make it the starting point of our developmental activities.

Another dimension that is closely linked with the process of development in Gujarat is the growing unwillingness of the youth, not only from urban centres but also of those from rural areas, to work in agriculture. This feeling is widespread both in the relatively prosperous Kheda district and in Saurashtra. The growth of the footloose industry of diamond polishing has facilitated the spread of these preferences. However, other similar activities with a high level of value addition and a good market need to be identified and developed. The ready-made garment industry as also other activities requiring assembling of parts and components such as for electronic equipment can easily be developed in Gujarat.

However, the past efforts to set up special industrial estates in the state capital have not achieved the expected degree of success. The foundations of such development can be laid only through universal literacy, vocational education to promote craftsmanship and technical skills, and a sound knowledge base. Urgent attention needs to be paid to the issues of arresting environmental degradation (of air, water and soil) and protecting the natural resource base, including the forest wealth of Gujarat. The ecology commission set up by the state, as also the concerned intelligentsia need to play an active role in safeguarding the interests of the future generations and restraining the maximization of short-term gains by the present population. A far-sighted leadership must evolve a balanced long-term perspective so that this dynamic state can develop to its best potential.

# Polarised communities

GHANSHYAM SHAH

IN the 1980s, Gujarat was plunged into two widespread anti-reservation agitations spearheaded by the upper castes. The first (1981) was directed against the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs); the second (1985) was against the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The deprived groups failed to unite in their fight against the upper castes with the result that the government diluted its pro-OBC and dalit policies. During the second agitation, which took the toll of Chief Minister Madhavsingh Solanki, inter-caste conflicts occasionally turned into communal riots between the Hindus and Muslims, sidetracking the issue of reservation.

In the subsequent years, communal riots continued to dominate public life in Gujarat. Between 1988 and 1993, the state experienced the highest number of anti-Muslim riots in the country. Cashing in on these communal clashes, the BJP ultimately rode to power in 1995. With the BJP at the helm today, pro-backward caste politics has decisively taken a back-seat.

The inter-caste and Hindu Muslim conflicts convey an impression that Gujarat is sharply polarised on caste as well as communal lines. To an extent this is true, but the intensity of both has not been the same. Despite an ascendancy of caste identity and

consciousness at the ground level, communal polarisation between Hindus and Muslims has been sharper than that among the castes. The state does not have a Mayavati, Mulayam Singh or a Laloo Prasad Yadav who deploy a caste idiom and argue against communal politics. On the other hand there are many, including from among the OBCs, who talk the language of communal politics *a la* an Ashok Singhal, Thakare or an Uma Bharati. The agenda of the champions of Hindutva is to integrate various castes in harmonious unity against the 'others'.

**A** hundred years ago, according to the *Bombay Gazetteer*, Gujarat was 'pre-eminently a land of castes. In no part of India are the subdivisions so minute...' In 1827, there were as many as 207 castes in the city of Surat alone which did not marry outside of their community.<sup>1</sup> Over time, new castes formed and several acquired a new nomenclature. Given the different historical experiences and uneven development over the last century, social and economic inter-relationships between different castes vary throughout the region. Hence, the need to be cautious about any generalisations at the macro level.

Gujarat is a land whose people are blessed with great business acumen. Vantias, one of the forward castes, constitute nearly 3% of the population. They are scattered throughout the state with a majority now living in urban areas. They occupy leading positions in business and industry. Pragmatism is the dominant cultural trait that influences their behaviour and inter-personal relationships. Their primary concern is to protect

their business interests rather than hold political office. Though they initially resisted the rise of new progressive groups, their adjustment to the changing circumstances was quick. The pragmatism of the Vania has become synonymous with Gujarati culture.

Brahmins and Rajputs are the other important forward castes. Brahmins, comprising 4% of the population, form the single largest group in white-collar jobs and new self-employed professions like doctors, engineers and architects. Few Brahmins and Vantias live a hand to mouth existence, or work as manual labourers in the farm and non-farm sectors. They, however, enjoy leadership positions in the trade unions of both the organised and unorganised sectors. Brahmins continue to hegemonise educational institutions, literature, media and other spheres of public life and have assumed responsibility as the torch bearers in society by articulating, producing and reproducing cultural values, idioms and goals.

**R**ajputs, traditionally rulers and army men, constitute another 5% of the population. Though occupying a high status in the caste hierarchy, their position in the forward caste bloc is ambivalent. Their cultural practices and economic conditions are different from those of the Vantias. A majority of them are not well-off. Nearly a fifth are landless labourers. Their educational level is relatively low, similar to that of the backward castes. Moreover, they have marital ties with the Kolis and other tribes considered low in the Hindu caste hierarchy.

The Patidars, traditionally known as Kanbis, have improved their economic condition over this century. They constitute the largest peasant caste and a majority of them are either middle class or rich peasants. In urban

areas, a sizeable number are in business – small and big – professionals, and hold white collar jobs in the private and public sectors. They constitute the single largest social group among the Gujarati NRIs in North America and Europe.

**T**he Patidars follow many of the cultural practices of the Vantias and consequently elevated their position from the middle to high caste. Of course, this was not without resistance as it challenged the hegemony of the Vantias and Brahmins. The latter could not block the Patidars given their economic clout and numerical strength which at 13% of the population, is more than the Vantias and Brahmins put together. However, the Patidars are less pragmatic and more aggressive than the Vantias in asserting their position. While they have steadfastly protected their newly acquired power and position and now enjoy a leading position among the forward castes, their relationships with other castes remains conflictual.

Together, the forward castes constitute roughly 26% of the population. They occupy three-fourths of the middle class space and more than 95% of the rich class space, owning big industry and business firms in the state. With a few exceptions, mostly Rajputs, who are for all practical purposes closer to backward castes, they stand apart.

The government of Gujarat has identified 82 castes as socially and educationally backward. Also known as the other backward castes they constitute nearly 40% of the population. Among them, 65% of the castes belong to different segments of the Kolis, constituting around 24% of the population. A large number are poor peasants and agricultural labourers. In urban areas they are blue collar workers in the formal and informal sectors.

1. James Campbell (ed.), *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol IX, Part I, *Gujarat Population: Hindus*, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1901.

As many as 35% of the Koli families, as against 8% of Vaniyas and Brahmins, are totally illiterate. However, differentiation within the Kolis cannot be overlooked.

**O**ne-tenth of Kolis are rich peasants. A small number are in self-employed professions and business, competing with the forward castes. The Thakores, Patanvadias, Bareeyas and others of central Gujarat, whom the British census officers clubbed with the Kolis, do not accept this identification. They prefer to call themselves Kshatriyas. Whereas the Kolis of Saurashtra are known by the same name, those of south Gujarat are recognised as Koli-Patel. The Kolis of south Gujarat are more educated and enjoy better prospects in non-farm economic activities than their counterparts in central Gujarat.

Scheduled Castes, traditionally called untouchables (now dalits) form nearly 7% of the population. Most of them are small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and non-farm workers in rural areas, or blue collar workers in urban areas. But at least 6% of the families have at least one member who has been to college. This proportion, though still low in comparison to Brahmins and Vaniyas, is higher than among OBCs or even Rajputs. In primary and secondary

education they compete with Patidars. Their proportion in government jobs, due to reservations and their collective assertion, has considerably increased during the last two decades despite opposition of the forward as well as other backward castes.

Scheduled tribes comprise 15% of the population. A vast majority of them are marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. Of the social groups whose land has been acquired by the government for various 'development' projects such as dams and industries, they are the biggest sufferers. Their forest resources are being depleted and they constitute the main losers in a fast developing market economy. The incidence of higher education among the STs remains low and its proportion in white collar jobs, despite reservations, is insignificant.

**O**n the whole, it is the forward castes who have cornered the benefits of development in agriculture and industry. But this does not mean that the deprived castes have not gained since Independence. Though the overall gap in socio-economic conditions between the forward and deprived castes has widened, at the same time a small strata of the OBCs, SCs and STs with productive assets, marketable surplus and skills have managed to become part of the urban middle class.

Having somewhat improved their economic position, they aspire to a higher social status. One route to upward mobility is sanskritisation through joining reformist religious sects. They perform religious rituals and ceremonies and imbibe the value systems of the forward castes. They are advised to maintain the *varna* system and preserve their *dharma* to claim higher social status. In order to maintain their newly claimed identity, they distance themselves from and look down upon those who are traditionally ranked below them. Thus is caste hierarchy legitimised and perpetuated.

**T**he modern service sector is the only non-traditional vocation available to a small segment of the deprived castes to secure income, status and power. The rich peasants among the OBCs are not wealthy enough to absorb the entire family in agriculture, nor have they accumulated sufficient surplus to invest in business and industry. It is mainly reservation in government jobs (7% to 14% for SCs and STs respectively since 1951 and 10% for the OBCs since 1976) which has facilitated their entry in this sector.

Not that this has been without resistance from the forward castes who consider it their traditional prerogative to be white collar employees.

TABLE 1

Land Ownership by Caste of Households in Rural Gujarat \*

	Brahmin	Vania	Rajput	Other upper castes	Patidar	Artisan castes	Koli	Other backward castes	SC	ST	Muslim	Others	N
No land	36	68	19	62	11	41	29	54	51	28	56	64	33
1-3 acres	7	8	13	7	6	12	28	8	19	26	5	16	17
4-5 acres	19	10	20	10	16	15	19	10	15	29	11	7	19
6-10 acres	13	4	19	12	22	12	11	13	10	12	12	2	14
11-15 acres	8	4	9	4	15	6	5	7	3	3	8	4	6
16 acres & above	17	7	19	4	30	13	8	8	3	1	9	6	10
Total N	300	104	1953	68	1923	932	3091	1567	1702	3272	695	67	15674
	(100)	(101)	(99)	(99)	(100)	(99)	(100)	(100)	(101)	(99)	(100)	(99)	(99)

\* Data collected in 1984-85.

They claim that they are more efficient than the members of deprived castes. Rising unemployment among the educated has added fuel to the fire. The bureaucracy, dominated as it is by the forward castes, has resorted to various tricks to sabotage the reservation policy. It evidently irks the forward castes to see a new generation of OBCs and dalits assert their rights to lead a dignified existence.

**V**arious legislations abolishing the zamindari system in the fifties sharply polarised the Patidars and Rajputs, particularly in Saurashtra. The former gained while the latter lost their privileges and political power which they had enjoyed for centuries. The Rajputs have not been able to overcome the hangover of past glory and power. They consider it infra dig to take to the plough and where they have, agricultural output has hardly improved over the last five decades.

The Patidars on the other hand, having occupied a leading position in the freedom struggle, dominated the Congress party and government. They have benefited most from the subsidy, credit and other inputs under various community development programmes. They successfully made the shift to commercial crops like groundnut, sugar and cotton. With surplus from agriculture and through entrepreneurship some of them have entered business and industry. The Rajputs are envious of their prosperity. This has resulted in a conflict between Rajputs and Patidars in Saurashtra which is all-pervasive in educational institutions, the co-operative sector and in village politics, often leading to violent clashes.

In mainland Gujarat, the primary conflict is between the Patidars and the Kolis. The Rajputs of this region, who were not big landlords, side with the Kolis given their tradi-

tional rivalry with Patidars. In the 18th and 19th century the Kolis, who once owned land, were reduced to becoming tenants and agricultural labourers by the Patidars. The land reform legislation could not restore their ownership rights since the Patidars successfully managed to retain the land and evict the Koli tenants. With the commercialisation of agriculture the Patidar-Koli conflict further sharpened as the latter usurped common property resources. Clashes between the two in this part of the state centers around land and wages.

**U**pto the early fifties, it was the forward castes who fought over political power. The competition between Patidars on the one hand and Vaniyas and Brahmins on the other generated tensions within the Congress party. The latter, though not aggressive, were crafty enough to maintain their position and protect their interests. The Rajputs, however, openly confronted the Patidars. They realised that

in order to protect their interests and wrest political power, they needed to expand their support base. This they did by incorporating the Kolis in their fold as Kshatriyas. The Kshatriya Sabha caste association was formed and the Kolis were mobilised by invoking the 'Kshatriya spirit'.

**T**he Congress party was pressurised to allocate positions to the members of the Kshatriya Sabha since their numerical strength in electoral politics could not be ignored. But the Patidar lobby within the party created many a hurdle in the path of aspiring Kshatriya leaders. They were not given membership books to enlist members in large numbers. Further, technical objections were raised to disqualify the Kshatriyas who had enrolled as members. To top it all, the Kshatriyas were branded as 'communal' for demanding positions in the party and state assembly.

In the sixties, the Swatantra party exploited this Kshatriya dissa-

TABLE 2

Occupations of Persons by Caste in Rural Areas Whose Families do not Own Land

Castes	Self emp- loyed profession	White collar job	Busi- ness	Agri- culture*	Agri- labou- rers	Fac- tory	Other (N)	Others	Total
Brahmins	36	4	14	1	6	6	—	34	140
Vaniyas	21	4	72	—	3	4	3	6	101
Rajputs	4	2	3	2	72	6	1	9	537
Other upper castes	8	12	48	—	—	15	8	8	60
Patidars	11	3	6	5	45	13	*	16	280
Kolis	6	4	4	1	38	34	3	9	406
Other back- ward castes	1	2	1	2	75	4	1	14	1718
Scheduled Castes	2	2	*	1	66	9	2	18	1456
Scheduled Tribes	1	1	*	1	64	4	1	28	1610
Muslims	2	2	22	*	58	6	2	8	446
Others	3	7	5	—	64	17	—	3	58
Total	3	2	4	1	61	7	2	19	8237

Note: Non-workers and N.A. are excluded.

\* Those who reported agriculture as their main occupation but not owning land.

tisfaction against the Congress by giving them positions in the party as also party tickets for the assembly elections of 1962 and 1967. Later, after the Congress split, Indira Gandhi gave more importance to the backward castes to win elections. The Congress(I) evolved the KHAM strategy, an alliance of the Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims for electoral purposes. Subsequently, other political parties, such as the Janata Dal and BJP, followed suit in appeasing the backward castes. As a result the strength of the OBCs in the state assembly rose from 7% in 1962 to 27% in 1991, whereas the proportion of Vaniyas and Brahmins went down from 32% to 14% during the same period. The Patidars somehow managed to maintain their strength.

**H**owever, the number of ministers from the forward castes remained high. The strength of the OBC ministers increased, though it did not go beyond 9% whereas the number of ministers from among the Patidars jumped from 6% to 24% during the last three decades. Ministers from Vania and Brahmin castes continued to hold important positions.<sup>2</sup> The overall domination of the forward castes in holding on to positions of power continues despite the electoral mobilisation of backward castes. But the OBCs have not given up the fight to get their due share of power.

With the rise in the levels of education and urbanisation, the second generation of dalits have become more assertive about their rights. The lifestyle of the urban educated dalits has changed. They dress, speak and behave like the middle strata of the upper castes and lay stress on human dignity. Not surprisingly, this change

was resented by the forward castes as well as the OBCs leading to greater intolerance. Moreover, the dalits' assertion of their rights over land, for high wages and use of common property resources and public places as equals was strongly resented by the non-dalits.

**C**onsequently, the cases of atrocities against dalits have increased during the last 25 years, though the blatant practice of untouchability in the public spheres may have declined. When dalits insist on entry to temples, celebrate certain festivals, or use common water facilities, they are often beaten up. The cases of murder and rape of dalit women are not uncommon. During the anti-reservation riots, dalit houses were set on fire in a number of villages. As many as 30% of the village panchayats still observe open or subtle discrimination in relation to elected members belonging to SCs.

Through various means the forward castes have consolidated their dominant position. The disunity and the conflict within the OBCs, SCs and STs has made it easier. Thus, the tribals fight a lone battle against the state and

the dominant castes. This has facilitated forward caste integration and its emergence as a single bloc unlike the deprived castes.

Inter-caste conflicts get softened by communal clashes between the Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims constitute nearly 9% of the population in Gujarat. There are sharp economic differences within the community with nearly one fifth of the Muslim cultivators being rich peasants. In business, their proportion is next to the Vaniyas, though in big industry they lag behind the Patidars. At the same time, among the farm and non-farm workers, their proportion is sizeable, close to that of the OBCs. In urban areas 11% of them are blue collar workers. Their proportion in self-employed professions and white collar jobs is as low as that of the OBCs and SCs.

**T**he history of riots between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat can be traced back to the late 18th century. But the earlier conflicts were localised and usually confined to one or two social groups of both religions. The riots had not resulted in the Hindus or Muslims automatically splitting into opposite

TABLE 3

Caste and Occupation of Workers in Urban Gujarat						(Percentages)
						N = 14,725
Castes	Business	Profession	White collar	Blue collar	Others	Total
Brahmins	10	14	34	4	38	100
Vaniyas	28	4	21	4	43	100
Rajputs	14	1	24	24	37	100
Other upper castes	25	2	20	11	42	100
Patidars	19	4	17	12	48	100
Artisan castes	20	2	15	28	35	100
Kolis	8	2	14	34	42	100
Other backward castes	12	2	11	32	43	100
Scheduled castes	8	2	21	33	36	100
Scheduled tribes	7	2	17	35	39	100
Muslims	28	2	15	23	32	100
Others	23	5	23	21	28	100
Total	18	4	18	22	38	100

2. Nagindas Sanghavi, *Gujarat: A Political Analysis*, Center for Social Studies, Surat, 1996.

camps; nor did they assume nationalist overtones. However, during the British and post-British period the leaders of both the communities attempted to mobilise different segments of the community as one unified group against the 'other'.

The first major communal riot in post-independent Gujarat took place in 1969. In the seventies, when the state was engulfed by a number of agitations around the issues of price rise, corruption, authoritarian rule and so on, communal conflict was at a low ebb. It began to rise again in the eighties and spread to rural areas on the issue of Ram janmabhoomi. Tribal areas too were affected. During these riots the forward and deprived castes joined ranks against the Muslims. This was the result of a long drawn out strategy of Hindu nationalists to build unity around Hindutva.

**D**uring the last three decades a number of organised efforts were made by social and religious 'reformers' and founders of various sects to forge unity across sects and upper and lower caste Hindus. The Bharat Sevashram, Hindu Milan Mandir, the Swadhyay sect and other similar organisations rejected the notion that shudras occupied inferior and degraded positions, though they did not eschew the caste system.

According to the Bharat Sevashram, low caste Hindus were hard working, strong and able to bear much suffering. 'Because of their numerical strength, they are truly the spinal cord of Hindu *jati*, i.e. race. Lakhs and crores of these people are getting dissociated from Hindu *samaj* because they are humiliated and looked down upon. As a result Hindu *jati* is becoming weak and powerless.'<sup>3</sup> They are

the real Kshatriyas who in the ancient period protected Hindu *samaj* against all calamities, aggression and shocks. According to the RSS, 'We are one... We are Hindus. Where is untouchability? For us, all are Hindus and nothing else... There is no varna of the *chaturvarna* or of caste. Today we have only one varna and *jati*, that is Hindu.'<sup>4</sup> The Vishwa Hindu Parishad exhorts: 'All Hindus should unite against *vidharmis*...'

**T**he proponents of this ideology seem to have succeeded in forging unity among the forward and deprived castes during the riots and mobilisation on the Ayodhya issue. They also managed the support of a sizeable section of dalits and OBCs, particularly their upwardly mobile strata, in the 1995 and 1998 assembly elections. Of late, the Sangh Parivar, the state machinery and printed media have launched a campaign against and persecuted Christians and Muslims. 'Facts' have been manufactured to malign the minorities as wicked, anti-social and treacherous. The Sangh Parivar has to some extent succeeded in sharpening social polarisations along communal lines.

But that does not mean that conflict of social and economic interests between the forward and backward castes/classes is dormant and can be wished away for long. In fact, tension within the BJP which led to a revolt by Shankarsinh Vaghela, or the present-day factional fights at all levels within the party, are manifestations of conflict on caste/class lines. The BJP, given its ideological framework and organisational structure, cannot hold power for long by harping on communal conflict alone.

3. Swami Atmanand, *Hindu Samaj Samanyaya*, Bharat Sevashram Sangh, Ahmedabad, 1982, p. 63.

4. Dattopat Dhengadi, *Samajik Samarasata*, Karnavati Samajik Samrasta Manch, Ahmedabad, n.d., p. 18.

# Ecological concerns

HASMUKH SHAH

GUJARAT exhibits a wide variation of geo-climatic environments. It is endowed with a great diversity of natural ecosystems ranging from deserts (including scrub-forests, grasslands, *ranns*) and coastal (including mangroves, coral-reefs, estuaries) to forests (including dry deciduous, moist deciduous and evergreen). These ecosystems harbour important habitats for a variety of plants and animals, including several rare and endangered species.

Economically, Gujarat is one of the richer states of India. It is believed that the state is, or would soon be, the number one industrial state of the country on several counts, including the proportion of workforce in industry and per capita industrial output. Also, with over a third of its population living in urban areas, it is among the more urbanised states with a network of about 225 urban centres.

The high levels of industrialisation and urbanisation also means larger demands for energy, water, land and infrastructure. As industrial activity gathers momentum in some of the less industrialised areas such as the coastal belt, ecologically important and fragile areas will face serious threats. Some of them like the thorn

forests in Narayan Sarovar, the habitat of the Asian wild ass, the breeding grounds of flamingos or the rare coral reefs in the Gulf of Kutch are the last remnants of their kind.

The demand for natural resources and their products in urban areas is high, especially resources such as fuel, timber, procured food and their products. Earth work, changes in drainage pattern, plantation, construction and waste disposal place stress on the natural ecosystems, resulting in a process of degradation and pollution of the area.

Economic development has not been an unmixed blessing anywhere. While several sections of Gujarati society enjoy an improved quality of life, the predominance of polluting industries – such as textiles, chemicals, hydrocarbons, pharmaceutical and cement – have an adverse fallout. The extensive withdrawal of groundwater in certain areas, overall hydrologic imbalance and population and livestock pressures have led to a process of desertification, increased soil salinity, drying up of traditional water sources and depletion of biodiversity. Gujarat's ecological health therefore, is a matter of some concern.



Two major controversies have contributed to sully the image of Gujarat as environmentally insensitive. One, the opposition to the height of the Narmada dam, and two, setting up of the Sanghi cement plant in an erstwhile protected area. Effective action on the part of NGOs and CBOS in the state, extensive public interest litigation resulting in strong judicial pronouncements, remedial actions initiated by the state government, setting up of institutions such as the Gujarat Ecology Commission (GEC) and the Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE), excellent work in watershed management and recharging of wells, overall increase in green cover and other positive developments have unfortunately received little attention.

**L**et us examine the state of Gujarat's ecological health, particularly with respect to key elements such as air, water, land and biodiversity.

Air quality in urban centres is far from satisfactory. The sulphur oxide (SO<sub>x</sub>) concentrations considerably exceed the norms (80 and 60 micro grams per cubic metre for industrial and residential areas respectively) in the industrial areas of Ahmedabad and Vadodara. Similarly, the nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) levels in Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat exceed maximum permissible limits (80 and 60 micro grams per cubic metre) for industrial and residential areas respectively. Particulate concentrations are higher than permissible in all the three cities (360 and 140 micro grams per cubic metre for industrial and residential areas respectively).

Further, even in rural areas, with the use of fuelwood and crop residues as fuel, there is considerable pollution in terms of suspended particulate matter (SPM) and noxious gases. Rural women bear the brunt of this pollu-

tion. Kirit Parikh observed that since more than 80% of the rural population depend on such non-commercial energy (NCE), the magnitude of pollution in the kitchens is significant. The cumulative effects of pollution in rural homes is high and serious enough to merit greater attention.

**L**arge parts of the state (north Gujarat, Kutch and Saurashtra) are drought prone with low and erratic rainfall. High variation in rainfall—in terms of locales, timing and quantity—within the state results in skewed availability of water resources. It is evident that the water needs—agricultural and industrial—cannot be met from the water available in each region. Large scale and 'mega' irrigation projects have thus become central to the solution of the problem. It is in this context that the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Project (SSNP) has captured the imagination of the people of Gujarat at all levels, from the grassroots to the highest levels of political decision-making and evokes strong support within the state.

Unfavourable geomorphologic conditions not only create shortage of surface water but also result in poor groundwater recharge. Evaporation rates are high, varying from 1.9 m/year in south Gujarat to over 2.3 m/year in Kutch and northern parts of the state. As a result, the groundwater resources are relatively limited and almost fully exploited in some parts of the state. Despite the fall in groundwater tables, efforts to drill more bore wells show no sign of tapering off.

Due to the discharge of effluents from industrial estates and disposal of untreated sewerage, the lower stretches of the Sabarmati, Khari and Dhadar rivers have become highly polluted as have the Mahi, Narmada and Tapi rivers. While the water quality in most rivers is unsatisfactory

in terms of the Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), of greater concern, perhaps, are the levels of coliform count—an indication of the large quantity of untreated sewage that is dumped into these rivers.

The State Pollution Control Board and the state government have initiated several steps to control the increasing water and air pollution. The main sources of waste water are the municipal areas and the chemical industry estates. It is necessary that the requisite facilities for collection, treatment and disposal of effluents, such as common effluent treatment plants, be established in the industrial areas.

Further, there is a marked decline in the quality of groundwater in many parts of the state. The entire coastal belt of Gujarat is beset with problems of high salinity. A high fluoride content, associated with the geochemical nature of rocks, affects nearly 15 districts. The heavy withdrawal of groundwater has only worsened the situation.

**T**he net sown area in Gujarat during 1994-95 was around 96,087 sq km, i.e. less than 50% of its total geographical area. While the introduction of high yielding varieties helped increase grain yields to significant levels wherever irrigation water, fertiliser, agricultural machinery, pesticides and related inputs are provided, the droughts of 1985 and 1987 made clear that without abundant water these new varieties produced less than the old native ones. Extensive monocultures devoted to a single variety are far too susceptible to insect and disease attacks—despite or because of the massive use of pesticides.

Further, the water intensive cropping patterns have introduced new vulnerabilities like soil erosion and soil degradation in a number of areas. Remote data sensing reveals

that more than 78,000 sq km or 40% of the total area is degraded. Studies carried out by GUIDE (1996) concluded that the process of desertification is on the rise in Kutch and Banaskantha districts.

The area under forests is nearly 10% of the total land area of the state as against the national average of 18%. The per capita forest area in the state is 0.06 hectare as against the all India average of 0.13 hectare. Between 1950 and 1975, a nearly 4.1 million hectares of good forest was lost, including to agriculture.

**B**iodiversity forms the basis of life and development and plays an important role in protecting the resilience of ecological systems. Unfortunately, there are no major studies on the biodiversity and natural history of Gujarat. Scattered studies carried out in universities and other institutions are rather limited in scope, confined to a few species or a group of species in select areas. Recently the Gujarat Ecology Commission estimated that records exist for about 7040 microbial, 4300 floral and 2700 faunal species in the state or five, eight and four per cent respectively of those estimated for the country (GEC, 1996).

The floral richness is mainly attributable to the variety of niches available. There are nearly 2,200 species of higher plants belonging to 902 genera and 155 families representing 12.9% of the floral diversity of the country. A large number of mangrove species – as many as 27 – have been identified in the coastal regions of the state. The published records indicate that 53 species of plants are rare and restricted to certain localities only.

We now examine the conflict of interest in the exploitation of natural resources. Different perceptions lie at the roots of any conflict, and Gujarat

is no exception. It may be worthwhile to reflect on the reasons for such differential perceptions.

Despite a history of a fractured socio-political set up Gujarat enjoys a legacy of outstanding leadership. This has contributed to the emergence of different schools of thought on development, ranging from the traditionalist to the post-modernist, who not only set different goals but also propagate the adoption of diverse routes.

The state also has a strong organisational ethos traditionally passed on through a variety of non governmental organisations that work for social, cultural, economic, and even religious purposes. These community groups and organisations have, therefore, provided a ready vehicle for the acceptance and propagation of the different ideological schools.

**D**evelopmental efforts in the state have obviously failed to take due cognisance of this multiplicity. Instead of trying to forge a certain level of consensus with different stakeholders on important issues, state planning relied mainly on the verdict of the people's elected representatives. Any dissent was viewed as politically motivated, fit to be ignored. A natural corollary of this being reduced communication, it led to serious restrictions in the availability of information. Lack of proper information or only partial information often lies behind misinformation campaigns, which make for an environment of mistrust and ultimately to situations of conflict.

The levels of concern among the entrepreneurs for their products and by-products (chiefly wastes) are often quite different. This corporate insensitivity has led to serious conflicts in many cases. The case of Maradiya Chemicals at Sayla is a classic example of how toxic effluents were

released in the open, creating serious problems of land degradation and contamination of groundwater. For people in the neighbourhood, the productivity of land and the quality of water resources is of prime concern for the simple reason of survival. There are many other such cases, even in GIDC industrial centres, which have provoked the local people to take up cudgels, chiefly through agitation and public interest litigation.

Though pollution remains a major rallying point against many of the industrial units, the spin-off from such debates often broadens the scope to include questions related to allocation of natural resources, equitable distribution of wealth, protection of wildlife and conservation of traditional systems. Serious concern is expressed when water is made available for industrial purposes. Similarly, when bulk quantities of mineral resources and forest produce are diverted for commercial use, questions are raised about the rights and aspirations of the local people.

**W**hile these issues directly impinge on human welfare, a major concern has emerged about the protection of wildlife and conservation of traditional systems. The protracted legal battle on the issue of denotification of the Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary is a case in point. While the government rightly perceives the industrialisation of Kutch as a major step towards the uplift of this backward area, prominent environmental NGOs and individuals also rightly see it as the destruction of the last major chunk of wilderness in the state. The conflicts revolve around threats to natural habitats, conservation of rare and endangered species and accelerated pressures on a fragile ecosystem.

The issues raised while opposing the height of the Sardar Sarovar

dam provide a classic example of differential perceptions of development at the local level as against the larger interest of the state or nation. Activists stress issues related to human resettlement, the use of forest areas as current means of livelihood for the local people, and the breakdown of traditions. While the state is committed towards a just and comprehensive rehabilitation programme, the conflict around Sardar Sarovar has, nevertheless, opened up and perpetuated debates on a much wider front.

Finally, some sections question the entire approach towards development that is currently being followed in the state. They propagate the adoption of organic farming systems, greater reliance on local resource management, enhanced participation in decision-making processes at all levels and so on. Against this backdrop the government is working for the accelerated economic development of the state more successfully than in most other states.

**T**he major players in this drama are the politicians, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, people whose land has been acquired and who suffer due to water and air pollution, NGOs/CBOs, media and the judiciary.

The politician has shown greater concern for economic development as compared to protection of environment in the belief that industrialisation will generate more employment and higher revenues to the state – both politically important. The argument is that if the choice were between the survival of *agarias* (salt workers) and survival of the wild ass, the former would get preference. Or, if the choice was between a large cement plant generating employment and revenue on one hand and a few *chinkaras* or a dry thorn forest on the other, the cement plant would get precedence.

When the life span of a government is short (Gujarat has been ruled by seven chief ministers and once by a governor in the last five years) and elections become more frequent, political will gives place to political survival. The politician does not consider the long term implications of his decisions. In fast changing fortunes the politician has no time to look for solutions which can provide for coexistence of *agarias* and the wild ass or the cement plant and the dry thorn forest with acceptable adjustment on both sides.

**T**here are few politicians in the country who understand the complexities of environmental issues and their long term ramifications. This is largely because there has been little effort to inform people or their elected representatives on environmental issues, as was done by Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1950s for economic planning or about the use of science and technology to improve agricultural productivity.

Unfortunately, the politician is often kept at an arms length by the environmentalist. Rarely are elected representatives invited to workshops, conferences and seminars on environment. The politician no doubt has his own priorities of survival. But it must be conceded that rarely does a minister turn down a good environmental project if it is packaged with an orientation in favour of *adivasis* or the landless. The message, as one civil servant put it, is to correlate the environmental interest with that of the politician's to provide employment or access to resources like fuel and fodder to the poor.

The bureaucrat's job is to articulate the legislation, policies and programmes. While the politician incurs the wrath of environmentalists, the bureaucrat prepares the defence. By

training he is expected to carry out the policies of the government and not the personal wishes of political masters. But in reality, political pressure builds up with obvious consequences. Also, in the value system that has evolved over five decades, most bureaucrats prefer to work in departments dealing with industrial development or finance. There are few takers for agriculture, and even less for education or health. Barring some honourable exceptions, the department of environment is rarely the first choice. Nevertheless, some officers have tried to do justice to the given charge as disciplined soldiers, some have even suffered in the process. Recently, the position of the bureaucrat in Gujarat has been rather unenviable, as he has to spend considerable time in dealing with litigation leaving less time for developmental work.

**T**he entrepreneur wants a prime location for his unit irrespective of whether it is within or near a protected area, tourist site, near a holy shrine, or close to an urban area. The state government, in its eagerness to attract investment, is inclined to oblige the entrepreneur. However, given current regulations, the entrepreneur has to agree to all the conditions to protect environmental quality. In practice, some of them do take short cuts, or transgress the laid down limits. Some companies, making huge profits, have not hesitated to pump their highly toxic effluent into the earth with disastrous consequences. When such units were sought to be shut down, often the plea was to keep them going to protect the interest of workers. In such cases the entrepreneur's concern for his workers, who are normally denied even minimum safety equipment, is rather touching. Very few units have on their own followed rigorous environmental standards.

The people who lose their land are the worst sufferers since they forever lose the ownership of the means of production. The compensation that they receive is often used up in non-productive pursuits. There are no schemes for a profitable deployment of compensation. In some cases, mainly public sector, one member of the land loser's family may get a job. But other owners as well as the landless become unemployed. They are generally not equipped to find a place in the new industrial society.

**T**he neighbourhood communities who are victims of air and water pollution and soil degradation have for long suffered silently. In many cases the village wells and other waterbodies have been contaminated. In some cases sustained air pollution has caused diseases. Land degradation due to solid waste disposal or release of non-treated effluent and settling down of fine particles due to air pollution is evident in several areas. Unfortunately, when these people agitate, local leaders or toughies are brought into the fray. In some cases common community amenities are provided on a modest scale to assuage feelings.

NGOs in Gujarat are largely engaged in spreading awareness or in formulating and implementing specific projects in identified areas. Some, like the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), Shree Vivekananda Research and Training Institute (VRTI), Development Support Centre (DSC), Sadguru, Mahiti-Utthan have an excellent track record of creating awareness and/or implementing projects of far reaching importance in certain areas. Their success in informing people or their representatives, sensitising the bureaucracy and the entrepreneur or pro-

jecting the interests of neighbourhood communities has however been rather modest. Only in the recent past have NGOs and CBOs successfully taken up the cause of environmental pollution and projection of neighbourhood suffering as in the case of Sanghi Cement, Maradia Chemicals, Jetpur Sari dyeing units, Vatva-Odhav-Naroda industrial estates and industries around the Narmada estuary. Besides the NGOs listed above, mention may be made of the Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) and the Manaviya Technology Forum (MTF) in taking up the cause of neighbourhood communities.

**T**hough the media has highlighted environmental issues, the priorities and emphases of the vernacular and English language media differ. The electronic media has helped to create general awareness about the wonders of nature, but local issues affecting the life of the viewer rarely get aired. Also, consistency or objectivity in environmental reporting is rarely discernible. Negative stories get wider coverage while positive developments are seldom reported.

NGO and CBO activism and extensive litigation with regard to industrial pollution in the mid-90s has, after initial resistance, led to several positive developments in Gujarat. Industrial units have realised that they cannot pollute the air and water and indiscriminately discharge toxic waste. Though not necessarily out of concern for the environment, the industry has, due to judicial pronouncements, initiated measures to contain pollution within permissible limits.

Some industry associations have taken the initiative to set up common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) in their estates. Gujarat now claims to have the highest – almost 95% – compliance in pollution control in 17 CPCB classified industries. The first

hazardous waste disposal site in the country has been commissioned and 17 others are being developed. Treatment of hazardous waste at three locations has been completed for the first time in India. CETP's are in operation or under construction at 14 industrial estates. Gujarat is the first state to commission a GIS based hazardous waste tracking system. There are several other initiatives which have been taken up by the state government and GPCB. Studies of carrying capacity of certain areas have been undertaken. As a result there has been a sharp drop in litigation and closures. Gujarat is also planning to set up an institute on the lines of NEERI.

All this does not mean that everything is well on the pollution front. While action on various pollution litigations has been initiated, their success will depend on rigorous monitoring and deterrent action against erring units. It will be an acid test for all the regulatory mechanisms as well as of NGOs, CBOs and the media. While the ground realities are not ideal, there are clear signs of improvement

**G**ujarat started this decade as perhaps the state with the most unenviable record of industrial pollution. But it is likely to end it on a much more positive note. Compared to other states, Gujarat is poised to emerge as a cleaner state in terms of industrial environment within a decade.

The real concern, however, is about non industry-related ecological degradation, despite the excellent track record of NGOs in watershed development and recharging of wells. The increase in salinity, accelerated desertification, loss of marine biotic wealth and the depletion of biodiversity are areas of concern, particularly since the process is gradual and decision-makers may wake up to the danger too late.

# Images of Gujarati women

SONAL SHUKLA

*Jab kutte par sassa aya, tab badshah ne shahar basaya* (The king decided to establish a city where a hare confronted the hound), goes the old adage. Legend has it that the Sultan of Gujarat while on a hunt in a forest witnessed a hare who, instead of being scared and running away, turned to face and attack the hound. The Sultan was impressed. He felt that there was something unique about a soil that gave birth to such courage and bravery, even in a timid creature like the hare. He, therefore, decided to build a

city and settle a community of brave and courageous people. The name of the Sultan was Ahmedshah; the city came to be called Ahmedabad or Amdavad.

What the legend does not mention, but what is likely (if one subscribes to such legends) is that the hare was actually female. This could easily, maybe naively, explain the presence of many courageous and dynamic women in this city. Ahmedabad, though the name itself is now caught up in the renaming turmoil of revivalist politics,

has produced many great known and unknown women.

Anasuya Sarabhai was possibly the country's first woman trade unionist. Even though she was herself a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi and considered herself his follower, the Mahatma was a mere observer when, in 1917, she organised the first labour action against the textile mill owners in Ahmedabad, one of them owned by her own family (Shukla 1973, 56). Mrudula Sarabhai, together with Charumati Yoddha and others, established the Jyoti Sangh in 1934, the first militant organisation to fight against wife battery in India. Jyoti Sangh trained women volunteers and social workers to rescue women in distress (Basu 1996, 70). Mrudula Sarabhai is well-known for her role in managing the exchange of women kidnapped after the Partition and for her support to Sheikh Abdullah on the issue of Kashmir. The latter earned her imprisonment and oblivion.

**C**ountless women in Ahmedabad broke away from traditional constraints and taboos to join the Independence struggle. In the seventies, Ela Bhatt brought together women in the unorganised sector to create SEWA, the Self Employed Women's Association. The courage of these poor working women who pull carts, carry huge head loads and are engaged in all kinds of dangerous and backbreaking work is astounding. So is the business acumen of women hawkers and street vendors in Ahmedabad.

There are, of course, other explanations for the 'heroic' actions of Ahmedabad's women. The fact that Ahmedabad was the second largest centre of textile mills created certain socio-cultural conditions for women to live and work in. Women formed 20% of the workforce in the cotton mills in the 1920s (Jhabvala 1985, 27).

Gandhi chose to settle down in Ahmedabad after his return from South Africa in 1915 and lived there until the Salt March in 1930. His involvement with Ahmedabad society encouraged middle class women to participate in political activities.

There are many myths about the women of Ahmedabad and about Gujarati women in general. It is said that they are modern, adaptable to new ways, that they whizz around in their two wheelers and cars, and can drive hard bargains. Other impressions about them are that they are great travellers, enjoy mountaineering, study abroad, join their fathers' or husbands' firms, even start their own business. Also that they are articulate, aggressive and visible in public life. Middle class Gujaratis in towns and cities of Gujarat as also the Gujarati diaspora in Mumbai and outside India too share this view.

'Are there poor people in Gujarat also?' Our maid in Mumbai exclaimed when informed that our guest worked for the rights of the poor. Mumbai has a special relationship with Gujarat. For years after the state was formed in 1960, Mumbai had more Gujaratis than any city in Gujarat and set the trends and fashions. Gujaratis in Mumbai and other parts of rural and urban Maharashtra have done well financially.

**T**here are few Gujarati mill and factory workers in Mumbai even though many of them are owned by Gujaratis. Apart from the Municipal Corporation where a large number of sweepers are of Gujarati origin, there are only clusters of a few thousand Khumbars, Dubla adivasis, Kolis and Vaghris and other people from backward communities of Gujarati origin in the various shanty towns of Mumbai. The rest are upper caste people belonging to the upper and middle class.

The Gujarati middle class is more prosperous than its Maharashtra counterpart. Gujaratis own most of the retail shops and, along with the Marwaris, control most of the wholesale trade in Mumbai. Until recently these communities did not employ women. Though there were women teachers in schools and colleges and some Gujarati women in banks and other offices, the general impression was that middle class Gujarati women did not go out to work. However, in the last decade, Gujarati sales-girls in fancy jewellery shops and departmental stores and in big and small offices are a common sight. Economic pressures and a desire for better living standards have helped break the earlier reservation against middle class women going out to earn a living. One belief is that businessmen have realised that employing women reduces the risk of employees becoming rivals after learning the business and making contacts.

**P**oor Gujaratis no longer migrate to Mumbai. One does not come across new colonies of migrant workers from Gujarat in the towns and cities of other states. They either migrate to industrial centres within Gujarat or continue living as rural labour. The silent majority of invisible Gujarati women come from these communities. They carry a double burden of the traditional prejudices against women as well as the pressures of modern life generated by the anti-dalit, anti-minority and anti-poor policies of the ruling class.

There are sharp cultural differences between the three main regions of Gujarat – Kutch, Saurashtra and Kathiawad. Within Gujarat state or among Gujaratis, a Kutchi or a Kathiawadi will rarely identify himself/herself as a Gujarati. This is confusing for those unfamiliar with the context,

because the term Gujarat refers to the entire state as well as to the Gujarat region stretching from Vapi in the south to Banaskantha in the north.

Most of the industrial development has taken place in this region. Parts of the Gujarat region were modernised during British rule. Saurashtra, though smaller in size, was divided into over 200 princely states. More than a third of the 500 odd princely states in India were in Saurashtra, many retaining characteristics of medieval culture. Kutch has vast desert areas and many colourful but poor communities pursuing their professions in agriculture, traditional handicrafts, raising livestock and working on government projects. Kutch was under the rule of a single Rajput king. Its business communities – Baniyas, Bhatias, Lohanas and Khojas – have largely moved to Mumbai. However, the port area of Kandla and its export zone offers some employment as do the salt works.

**T**raditional Gujarati crafts like *bandhani*, colourful hand embroidery and applique work have been best preserved in Saurashtra, Kutch and north Gujarat, mostly by women. Saurashtra is also famous for its *garbas* and other folk songs. But, these regions retain many restrictive traditions for women. Caste panchayats, with their strong patriarchal powers, govern the lives of women of middle and backward communities all over Gujarat. In more backward regions they command a stronger hold on social life.

Saurashtra reportedly had the highest suicide rate among women in the country. It leads Gujarat in suicide among women even today (*Times of India*, 22 August 1997). As in Rajasthan, women from many communities have to cover their faces. Economic hardship does not permit seclusion of women and confining

them at home. But in the evenings, one comes across women in Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts carrying huge loads of fodder and fuel on their heads and walking long distances with their faces completely covered in *ghungat*.

**M**odern development superimposed on a basically unchanging feudal structure adds to the woman's burden. During the long drawn drought in the eighties, women in Kutch not only worked on road construction along with men and performed their traditional tasks of cooking and fetching water but, since the villages were now electrified, they were also engaged in embroidery work until midnight through an additional drought relief programme (Shah and Jani 1987, video).

Modern educational institutions came up in areas which were directly under the British. Few princely states, with the exception of Baroda during Sayajirao Gaekwad's reign and to an extent Bhavnagar, laid stress on education, especially women's education. Most parts of Saurashtra did not even have a high school in the 19th and early decades of the 20th century. While many upper caste communities opened free or low priced hostels for boys of their communities, girls, even those from wealthy upper caste families, at best received some primary education.

Gaekwad, on the other hand, provided free and compulsory education for all in Baroda state and further supported education by a network of libraries. For many years after Independence there were families in the former Gaekwad areas of Baroda, Amreli and other parts of Saurashtra where a grandmother could read and write while the mother and daughter were illiterate. North Gujarat, which shares a border with Kutch and

Rajasthan, remains the most backward district of Gujarat. At 18.9%, it has the lowest female literacy rate in the state.

Gujarat has no tradition of dowry among the Brahmins and the Baniyas. The one exception is the Anavil Brahmin community in south Gujarat with a system of dowry in cash and gold. The Anavils, also known as Desais, are not considered proper Brahmins since they cannot perform religious rites and rituals. The Anavils have been land owning farmers and administrators (Ghaswala 1993, 9 and Van Der Veen 1987, 26).

**T**he other community, apart from the Rajputs, who exchange dowry are the Leva Patidars or Patels of Kheda district in central Gujarat. They profited from cash crops like cotton and tobacco in the 19th century. Many Patels immigrated to Africa, Fiji and New Zealand during the colonial period and, in the last forty years, to the UK and USA. The community produced amongst the earliest advocates and administrators. Unlike Anavils, the Patels have become more powerful in business and politics after Independence.

Rajputs hail mainly from Kutch, Saurashtra and north Gujarat regions. Female infanticide was rampant among them for two reasons. One was the large dowry that had to be paid for getting daughters married. However, one could not marry within the same *kula* and, according to the rules of hypergamy, a girl could not be married into a lower *kula*. The higher the *kula* status of the bridegroom, the higher the dowry demanded.

The governor of Bombay had to legislate against female foeticide. This was objected to by the Rajputs. The Rana of Kutch wrote to the governor arguing that since his Jadejakula was the highest in Rajput hierarchy,

it had no alternative but to kill its daughters (Oza 1983, 29). Other Rajputs claimed exemption on grounds of poverty. Finally, with fines levied on guilty daughter killers, to which the British government added a substantial grant, a dowry fund was set up for poor Rajputs.

It is well established that female infanticide was traditionally not confined to Gujarat or to the Rajputs alone. It was also prevalent among some of the richer and more powerful Leva Patidar families (Desai 1983, 292). The Gujarati practices were documented because of the interventions of a British governor in the 19th century. However, two points are of interest since they indicate a certain attitude to women's right to survival. One is that the princes, who enjoyed substantial autonomy within their fiefdoms, protested against a ban on female infanticide and used their power and status to counter the mandate of the governor and so continued with the practice.

The other is that social reformers, who were quick to seek support from the British on issues such as women's education, widow remarriage or age of consent for consummation of marriage, did not take an active interest in putting an end to female infanticide. It would appear that the caste background of the reformers – mainly Nagar Brahmins, Banias or Zoroastrians – played a significant role. They had been influenced by modern institutions as students, teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats or traders. They lived in towns and cities with little connection to land and agriculture, whereas female infanticide was most prevalent among the feudal princes and their community or among rich farmers.

Even the question of dowry was rarely raised in public until Ishwar

Petalikar, a writer and reformer of Patel origin, took the initiative in the post-independence period. Unlike the popular novels of Sharatchandra in Bengal or Khandekar in Maharashtra, dowry never featured as a theme in the works of their Gujarati contemporaries like K.M. Munshi and R.V. Desai. Gujarat is the second most industrialised state in the country after Maharashtra. It also ranks third in violence against women after Punjab and Haryana (*Indian Express*, 22 August 1997).

In Gujarat, as elsewhere in the country, agricultural and artisan communities with a tradition of bride-price are now switching over to dowry. While dowry has not yet been formally introduced among Brahmins and trader communities, wedding expenses have increased, most of them borne by the bride's family (Shukla 1991, 246). Different agricultural communities who identify with Patels of Kheda district have adopted a dowry system. This is also true of a section of Anavils among whom dowry has increased with the spread of education. The Anavils were among the first upper caste communities to consider woman's employment in the organised sector as a part of dowry.

However, not all cases of gender violence are dowry related, though demand for dowry is routinely mentioned by women and their families in complaints. After the 1970s and '80s, the government had portrayed dowry as the main source of women's oppression. The chances of a complaint receiving attention are slightly better in such a situation.

A CID report, which records dowry deaths as a separate category, puts the figure at 63 for the year 1996. The cases of suicides among women stand at 1475 while registered accidental deaths are 2724. There are 345

cases of murder. 20 women die of burns in Gujarat daily. Between 1994 and 1996, 16,000 women died of burns and another 3800 attempted suicide by self immolation. (The euphemism for that in the Gujarati language is *agnisnan*, which, considering the ritual purity attributed to being enveloped by fire, is dangerous). The euphemism for killing infant daughters is *doodpiti* (a ritual involving pushing a girl's head into a pot of boiling milk and crying out that she choked while drinking it). As an Additional Director General of Police in the state CID, pointed out, the biggest challenge in burn cases is to determine whether or not they were accidental (*Times of India*, 22 August 1997).

A research study investigating unnatural deaths of women in Gujarat revealed that the largest number of such deaths continue to be reported from Saurashtra and Kutch. Harassment of married women by the matrimonial family also remains the main cause behind unnatural deaths of women (Bhagat 1990, 44). Of the 407 cases in which data on caste and religion was available for 1988, 355 were Hindu, 50 Muslim, one Christian and one Jain. 73 deaths were women from the upper castes and 63 were from middle castes. 32 were from the artisan castes and 94 from other backward caste categories.

Of the 482 cases in which information about reasons leading to death was available, 167 were attributed to harassment by in-laws and family disputes; 43 to conflict with husbands. The reason given in 8 cases was economic crisis, whereas 6 were killed because they were believed to have been witches. 62 were from scheduled castes and 26 from scheduled tribes. Out of 579 cases, 468 were married and 111 unmarried. The most vulnerable age group was 21 to 25 followed



by 26 to 45 (*ibid*, 25). A government committee which surveyed 4537 cases of suicide in Gujarat during 1960-64 reported that the incidence of women victims in castes such as Kanbi, Patel and Kshatriya Rajput was almost double that for men. The difference was also substantially higher among dalits and Brahmins (*ibid*, 64).

**B**oth studies indicate an eclectic distribution of unnatural deaths of women across castes. The six women who were killed as witches were most likely adivasi women. This practice is also prevalent among adivasis of Dahanaluka of Maharashtra adjoining Gujarat. An increase in the incidence of witch hunting is attributed to, among other things, pressures of modernisation, ecological destruction leading to failure of the traditional herbal cures, and making an old or rebellious woman a scapegoat (Kash-takari Sangathana 1984, 88). A desire to appropriate land is a major cause for witch hunting. Sexual harassment, kidnapping, rape and murder of adivasi women also takes place on development sites (Sres 1994, 1-28).

Why is there such a contrast between the public image of Gujarati women as strong and the level of violence they face? One can only make conjectures. The number of registered cases of violence against women may be greater than in other states but the causes that lead to violence and death are not any different from what is seen in other parts of India. But because of the public image of its upper caste and upper class women, Gujarati women are expected to cope better. The Gujarat case also confirms the belief that if economic development takes place without corresponding social progress women not only do not share the benefits of development, they are actually adversely affected.

The feminist movement of the 1980s had a limited impact on the state. After the early years, SEWA distanced itself from it. Apart from Sahiyar in Baroda which has a left orientation, and Astitva in Valsad which was formed as a spontaneous action by women who wanted to examine their own lives and those of women around them, most other women's groups continue to work as conventional NGOs.

The autonomous women's groups (AWGs) that came into existence as non-party political formations did not have a counterpart in Gujarat, although many NGOs now identify with AWGs. Most of the AWGs in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad and Bangalore which came up in the '70s and early '80s were initiated by left-wing women. They had worked with left groups or parties on the issue of labour unions, democratic rights or community health. Their political experience contributed to raising issues of women's liberation. Unfortunately, there was no tradition of left politics in Gujarat. Apart from a Trotskyist group in Baroda and a few small far left groups, major communist parties or the socialists had no significant base in Gujarat. The participation of women's groups in the human rights movement in Ahmedabad too has been limited.

**W**as it the failure of Gandhism that ultimately gave birth to a new culture of violence? Gandhi was a product of a society which was in transition under colonial rule. He had a specially close relationship with Gujarat. All the progressive social and intellectual movements in the state were hegemonised by the Gandhian agenda. A more pluralist social movement might have helped Gujarat retain some of the other progressive tendencies after Gandhi's demise.

As it happened, from the 1920s all social reform and educational issues were interpreted by the Mahatma. At one point he even headed one of the most important literary institution, the Sahitya Parishad. But his leadership was unable to challenge or contain structural violence, oppression and injustice in the society and, therefore, did not have a substantial or long lasting impact on the status of women in the state.

**G**andhi has already been criticised for an anti-women workers' policy in the Textile Labour Association (Jhabvala 1985, 44). Although Gandhi had supported middle class women's organizations, his women supporters could not provide dynamic leadership to Gujarat after his death. During the Mahagujarat movement in 1956, for example, these women stated that their protest and participation was for supporting their men who had been dealt with violently by the police and the government. The women had no agenda of their own (Shodhan and Bhagat 1997). Community initiatives by Gandhians were confined to sarvodaya activities in rural pockets. These mainly related to land distribution, education and other development activity, without any specific reference to the empowerment of women.

There were some young women in the student-led Navnirman movement for social reconstruction in the early '70s. But by the 1981 riots against job reservation and seats in medical and other professional colleges, women were already participating in anti-dalit actions. This stand became more evident during the anti-dalit and anti-Muslim riots in 1985 (Women and Media Group 1985, 5). Incidentally, Gujarati middle class women actively supported the Ram Janmabhoomi and

other issues raised by the Hindutva lobby.

In Surat, on the other hand, where some of the worst anti-Muslim riots took place in 1993, there are no women's groups other than a branch of the largely apolitical All India Women's Conference. No local women's group emerged to fight communalism, even after various women's organisations visited Surat and submitted reports on the impact of riots on women.

**G**ujarat may not have the highest number of female infanticide cases any more, but there are many agencies at district and taluka levels to collect amniotic fluid for sex determination tests. The Gujaratis joke that while they go to Maharashtra to drink liquor which is not legal in their home state, Maharashtrians come to Gujarat for sex-determination tests because it is banned in Maharashtra to prevent female foeticide (Shukla 1991, 238).

Gujaratis even seem to accept bigamy more openly. The phenomenon of 'contract marriages' in the '70s was a Gujarati invention in which well-to-do married men made friendship contracts with young women from a lower economic strata. The former chief minister, Amarsinh Chowdhary of the Congress, contracted a bigamous marriage on the ground that as an adivasi he was governed by his customary law which permits polygamy. Even the Hindutva lobby did not object to this argument. A former president of the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, a Brahmin, lived openly with two wives and even wrote about it in his autobiography (Bhatt 1988, 65). Despite this, he was elected president. The present head of the Gujarati Sahitya Akademi in Maharashtra is a Jain who, by his own admission, has two wives. (Selaraka 1988, 98). Both of them accompany him to public functions.

Thus, despite significant development in many areas, injustice and violence against women continue to be perpetuated, and tolerated, in Gujarati society.

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# Garavi Gujarat

NIRANJAN BHAGAT

THIS essay endeavours to see Gujarat from far and near in terms of time and space, in terms of its history and geography; in other words, to see Gujarat as it was in the past and as it is at present. It is not an attempt to see Gujarat in all its multifarious aspects but only in a few select ones, which those who live in the state may take for granted and others who live outside are likely to miss, or misunderstand.

Gujarat is known as the land of the Banias, and rightly so, for it is they who symbolize Gujarat, form its image and foster its identity. At the outset, it is necessary to clarify that the Banias, like the Vaishyas, are not a caste but a community, a mercantile community which has dominated Gujarat and created a cultural climate – the Mahajan culture – in which the people of Gujarat have lived for centuries.

The origin of the Bania community can be traced to the Indus Valley civilization. There have been archaeological discoveries and excavations at Harappa in Punjab (1856), Mohenjo-daro in Sind (1922), Lothal in Saurashtra (1954) and recently at Dholavira in Kutch as well as in some other regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan (300 sites have been unearthed, of which 50 are located in Kutch, Saurashtra and Gujarat).

They reveal that a pre-Aryan civilization and a pre-Vedic culture existed in the Indus Valley and other regions of north-west India 1600 km north-south from Pakthan near Peshawar to Ambhore near Mumbai and 1100 km east-west from Dwarka in Saurashtra to Alamgirpur near New Delhi – between 3000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. No documents or monuments have been found and such relics as

seals, coins and script still remain undeciphered. Hence, little is known about its social structure, except that a predominantly mercantile community inhabited the Valley and that it had evolved a highly civilized society.

The Harappans came down from the Valley in the north to the sea-coast in the south around 2400 B.C. in search of fertile lands and potential ports. They developed Lothal as their most important port and, consequently, as a great city—as great as Mohen-jo-daro. These were different from the cities in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The civilization at Lothal survived till 1500 B.C., even though it vanished from the northern regions in 1600 B.C.

Lothal (the mound of the dead), 80 km south-west from Ahmedabad, discovered in 1954 and excavated from 1955 to 1960, is an archaeological marvel. It harbours debris up to a depth of 20 meters. It measures 284 meters north-south and 228 meters east-west. At the height of its glory it must have covered a wider area, as remains of habitation 300 meters away from the mound suggest. Among its many magnificent remains is a huge dock—a 218x37x5 cubic meter baked brick structure—superior to that of the Phoenicians and Romans in succeeding ages. The dockyard for berthing and servicing the ships could hold 30 ships of 60 tonnes each, or 60 ships each of 30 tonnes.

Its many remarkable relics – a mummy, an Assyrian's head, a seal with five ships sketched on it and seals of the Arabian and Sumerian cities and muslin and indigo found in the Egyptian pyramids – suggest that Lothal had overseas trade relations with Abbas, Bushayar, Behrin, Susa and Sumer. Lothal was, indeed, an international trade centre. Its prosperity came mainly from trade in cotton and ivory beads. The ancient sea-farers of

Lothal are the ancestors of the Bania community and it is they who have bequeathed the legacy of sea-faring to the people of Gujarat.

Gujarat has the largest coastline and the largest number of ports of all the states of India. It has a 1663 km coastline, which is 30% of India's total of 5700 km. Gujarat is surrounded by the sea on three sides. Of its 19 districts, as many as 10 have a sea-coast. It is this geography which has governed its history.

In pre-historic times, the Mahabharata refers to Prabhas and Dwarka, the two oldest ports of Gujarat. Dwarka literally means 'the gateway'. Phoenician ships came to the sea-coast of Saurashtra and Assyrian ships went to Iran via Dwarka.

In ancient and medieval times, Gujarat had 52 active ports, of which Bharuch, Khambhat and Surat were the busiest. Gujarat had overseas trade relations with a large number of countries – Sumer, Phoenicia, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Arabia, Iran, Maskat, Yeman, Hormuz and East Africa in the west and Lanka, Brahmadesh, Malaya, Burma, Java, Sumatra, Cambodia and China in the east. Buddhist and Jain writings and Kautilya's *Arthshashtra* mention the ports of Gujarat, the countries with which they had trade relations and the merchandise they exported and imported. Ptolemy's *Geography* and *Guide to the Red Sea* by an anonymous author provide detailed descriptions of the sea-coast of Gujarat. The latter even gives the Roman names of its major ports – Barik (Dwarka), Barigaza (Bharuch) and Kambayat (Khambhat).

Hsiuan-Tsang's *Travelogue* identified the sea as a major source of livelihood for the people of Gujarat. On the walls of a temple at Borobudur in Java a sculpture depicts the journey

of a few immigrants from Gujarat who settled in Java. On the walls of a cave at Ajanta a painting depicts the journey of Kumarvijay, the son of Sinhbahu, king of Sinhpur to Lanka which he renamed as *Sinhaldwipa*. History books in Lanka also record this story.

Gujarat was famous in the western world as 'the mistress of the sea' and the Saindhava community of Saurashtra as the 'lords of the ocean'. From the 11th to the 17th century, Bharuch was at the height of its glory. In the 15th century as many as 4000 ships passed through Bharuch. Next to Bharuch, Khambhat was a prominent port during this period.

In the 17th century, Surat surpassed both Bharuch and Khambhat. Traders from all over the world came to Surat. Muslim, Arab, Turkish, Iranian, Jewish, Dutch, Portuguese, English and Armenian traders had settled in Surat. The Parsis had already made it their home in the 11th century. The Muslim traders were the most outstanding among them – Virji Vora, Mulla Mahammad Ali and Ahmed Chameli. Pilgrims went to Mecca for Haj from Surat. Hence, Surat was known as Meccaidwar, Meccabari, Babul Mecca. In the 19th century the Portuguese, Dutch, British and the French had factories in these three famous ports. Earlier, a local pilot, Kanji, had guided Vasco da Gama on his way to India.

In the 19th century it was again the people of Gujarat, especially the Parsis, who developed Bombay as a port, which till recently accounted for 40% of India's marine trade. It excelled over the other ports of Gujarat including Surat. Lowji Nusserwanji Wadia, one of the world's greatest ship builders, was famous throughout the world. He was a foreman in a dockyard in Surat and was invited by the British to

Bombay in 1736. In Gujarati, Wadia, means a ship-builder. His sons and grandsons were also great ship-builders. One grandson, Jamshetji Bomanji Wadia had built a ship in 1800 A.D. which sailed the world's seas for years. Another grandson, Narowji Bomanji Wadia, built the battleships which the British engaged against Napoleon, including Nelson's battleship at Trafalgar – the 'Victory'. One of them still exists at Gosport near Southampton. Again, it was a Gujarati family which established the first Indian shipping company in Bombay in 1919 – the Scindia Steam Navigation Company.

**I**n the early 20th century, the Bania community established 66 textile mills in Ahmedabad, making it 'the Manchester of India'. In the late 20th century, Gujarat has the biggest port in India, Kandla, which handles three million tonnes of merchandise annually. It also possesses 40 small and medium size ports, which handle about 2 million tonnes of merchandise annually. This is 70% of the total merchandise handled by all other similar ports in India.

Gujarat ranks first among the states of India in industrial and infrastructural investment. Of the total investment of Rs 12,30,745 crore in 3700 units, Gujarat's share is 10.49% or Rs 1,33,763 crore in 430 units. Of the total investments in industry in Gujarat, the share of the chemical industry is 70%. Gujarat is poised to emerge as 'the chemical state' of India at the beginning of the next century. For centuries the state has fascinated foreign traders. Currently it has attracted investments of Rs 3,435 crore from multinational companies for trade, commerce and industry. Of the 1.5 million Indians who have migrated and settled in the UK and USA, 50% are from Gujarat.

As the poet Nanalal says, '*Mahasagarnan pruthvivishal/Sarovar Kidhan Gurjari ball*' – the people of Gujarat have turned the vast oceans of the world into small lakes. A popular rhyme says, '*Jave je konar gayo, nave mandirmany / Jo ave pachho phari, pariya pariya khay!*' – One who goes to Java, does not return. / If he does, he brings wealth which would last for generations. A popular phrase refers to '*Lankani ladi ne Ghoghano var*' – the bride from Lanka and the groom from Ghogha. Such are the heroic tales of adventure and enterprise of the Bania community of Gujarat! Such is the sublime saga of the seafarers of Gujarat!

It is neither the monarchs nor the generals, not the Brahmins or the Kshatriyas, but the Bania community and its culture which has socially dominated and economically dictated Gujarat for centuries. The land of Gujarat is fertile. But more than the land and agriculture, its prosperity comes from the sea and trade, commerce and industry, owned and organised by the Bania community.

**P**ace is a pre-requisite for prosperity. The people of Gujarat, therefore, prefer compromise and cooperation to conflict and confrontation. They are gentle and generous, not aggressive or assertive, nor stubborn or obstinate. They are broad-minded and large-hearted, honest and hard-working. They possess not only common sense but also unusual wit and worldly wisdom. They can solve a problem or resolve a crisis with patience and persuasion. They do not bear a grudge or harbour a grievance against anyone. Gujaratis would rather forgive and forget. They are humble and hospitable. They are tolerant and yet tactful; courteous and yet calculating. They can write off and give up but without writing off their dignity and

giving up their honour. They will meet the opponent or partner half way for mutual benefit. 'I give up half, you give up half, but let us go ahead' is their way of life. 'Live and let live. Earn and let earn!' is their motto. In a word, *kadado* (compromise) is the secret of the success of the Bania community.

**M**any immigrants and exiles, traders and invaders settled in Gujarat, which not only accepted but absorbed and assimilated them. The most striking example are the Parsis. Around 766 A.D. they fled Persia due to torture and persecution by the Arabs and migrated to Diu in Saurashtra where they stayed for 19 years. Once again, around 785 A.D. they migrated to Sanjan in south Gujarat as a result of terror and persecution by the Portuguese. They sought asylum and Jadi Rana, the ruler of Sanjan, offered them a cup full of milk, implying that Sanjan was already overcrowded and that there was no room for them. They added sugar to the milk and returned the cup to the ruler, suggesting that they would mix and mingle with the local people like sugar in milk. They were at once accepted and eventually settled in Navsari, Valsad, Udvarda, Surat, Bombay and many other parts of Gujarat and India.

The spirit of the Bania community and its Mahajan culture is embodied and expressed in one of the finest sayings in the Gujarati language: *Kajiyanun mon kalu* – the face of the quarrel is black, as also in some other sayings: *Vano Verine Vash Kare* – courtesy conquers all, even the enemy; and *Vaniabhaini nichhi muchh* – the Bania has a lowered mustache. In Nabhinandan's *Jinoddhar Prabandh* Gujarat is glorified as *Vivek Bruhaspati*, a perfect example of equanimity.

The formal expression and the finest embodiment of the culture of the

Bania community can be found in its mahajans (guilds). The history of the mahajans in Gujarat can be traced to the 16th century, though it could be even older, as old as the trade itself. The history of the mahajans of Surat and Ahmedabad is recorded in detail, including the names of their leaders – Virji Vora, Hari Vaishya, Abdul Gafur in Surat and Shantidas Jhaveri in Ahmedabad. Panchis, the artisans' guilds were caste-based, while the mahajans were not, being trade or profession-based. Their members were traders or financiers. There was no discrimination of caste, creed, colour, race or religion and their members comprised Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Parsis.

**T**he guilds were headed by *nagar-shethis* (city-heads), who formed a federation of guilds. They determined hours of work and wages, controlled prices, set holidays and festivals and managed educational institutions. They protected the rights and interests of their members, settled quarrels between individual members or mahajans and protected themselves against the state and fought against its tyranny and injustice.

In 1669, in Surat, the mahajan protested against the *Kazi* because he promoted the conversion of the Hindus and observed a week-long strike till Emperor Aurangzeb and the Kazi offered their apology. In 1816, in Ahmedabad, the mahajan observed a violent one-day strike against the Maratha rulers. Foreign historians have noted that emperors (Moghul, Maratha and British) may come and emperors may go but the mahajans of Gujarat go on forever!

In the last 100 years there have been four non-political strikes in Ahmedabad by textile workers over problems of wages: an eight day strike in 1895, 15 days in 1917, four weeks

in 1918 during which Mahatma Gandhi undertook a fast unto death and resolved the problem peacefully, and a 10 week strike in 1923. There was a unique 100 day political strike by textile workers in Ahmedabad against the British government as an integral part of the 'Quit India' movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi.

**A**s a consequence of the 1918 strike, the Majur Mahajan was founded in Ahmedabad in 1920 on Gandhian values and principles. Mahatma Gandhi was its member from day one till he died in 1948. He guided it as a model to be emulated elsewhere in India, making it one of the best organised trade unions in India. It has evolved a unique and highly successful system of industrial arbitration. For the last 80 years Ahmedabad has enjoyed industrial peace, as no other city in India – thanks to the Majur Mahajan which has inherited and imbibed the traditions of the old mahajans of Gujarat. The Ahmedabad Millowners' Association (now Ahmedabad Textile Mills Association) was established in 1891 and has been active for more than 100 years. The Gujarat *Vepari Mahamandal* (Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry) is a federation which was founded in 1948. At present, about 300 mahajans and associations of trade, commerce and industry in Gujarat are affiliated to it.

Gujarat is protected by nature on all four sides: by mountains in the north, forests in the east, rivers in the south and the sea in the west. Hence, Gujarat has rarely been invaded, nor has it invaded others. The people have seldom engaged in warfare, being peace-loving.

In pre-historic times, as the Mahabharata, the mythical epic, says, Lord Krishna at a very young age migrated to Gujarat from Mathura,

established a kingdom of Yadavas and founded its capital city of Dwarka. In the last years of his life he returned to Gujarat after the battle of Kurukshetra. During the middle years of his life he only acted as a peace-maker. Even on the battle field he acted as a charioteer and not as a warrior, he only drove Arjuna's chariot though he possessed the mightiest weapon of war – the *Sudarshana*. This myth has made a great impact on the history of Gujarat. Buddhism and Jainism in ancient times, Vaishnavism and the devotional songs of the saints in medieval times and Mahatma Gandhi in modern times preached and practised love and compassion in Gujarat.

**M**ore than anything else, it is the culture of the Bania community comprising different religions, faiths and ethnic groups that has moulded the unique character and determined the peculiar nature of the people of Gujarat. For centuries they have displayed their heroism and prowess, a spirit of adventure and supremacy in enterprise on the sea as seafarers, not on the land as warriors. Even the martial races, the warrior castes like the Rajputs who migrated from north India and settled in Gujarat, gave up their weapons and war mania.

Before Independence, there were 396 native states in Gujarat – more than 50% of the total 656 native states in India. In the past, when the subjects of Kutch and Saurashtra revolted against tyranny or rebelled against injustice, they employed the traditional techniques of *tragu* (fasting), *dharanu* (squatting), *risamanu* (non-cooperation) and *baharvatu* (outlawry) against the state. In recent times, there were five strikes by textile workers and two *satyagrahas* by farmers against the British government on the problem of unjust taxes – at Kheda in 1917 and Bardoli in 1928.

It was here that Mahatma Gandhi experimented with satyagraha (non-violent non-cooperation) and later perfected it during his famous march to Dandi – the Dandi Kuch – in 1930. It is from Gujarat that a bania called Mahatma Gandhi bequeathed the gift of satyagraha to India and to the world. Today, it is universally acknowledged that satyagraha, not war, is the only way to peace and happiness. There were two landmark agitations by the students against their own government which lasted for months – the Mahagujarat in 1956 and the equally famous Navnirman movement in 1973.

**G**ujarat simultaneously worships both mammon and the muse. Both Laxmi (goddess of wealth) and Saraswati (goddess of learning) have showered their blessings on Gujarat. While being materially rich, it is certainly not intellectually poor. It is rich in the matters of the mind. Since medieval times the people of Gujarat and their language and literature have been derided: *Gurjaranam mukham bhrashtam* – the mouth of the people of Gujarat is corrupted – and *Shun shan paisa char* – their language is worth four paise. This is an unfair and distorted perception.

Gujarat has a history of learning comparable with any other state. In ancient times, Hsuan-Tsang and I-Tsing noted in their travelogues that the university at Valabhi, the then capital of Gujarat, was as great as those at Nalanda and Taxshila. In medieval times, at Patan, the then capital of Gujarat, Hemchandracharya's grammar *Siddhham* was placed on an elephant and taken out in a procession which was led by Gujarat's king, Siddharaj. Hemchandracharya and Vastupal were great scholars and their disciples were known for their learning. At Patan, Siddharaj founded 21

libraries, one of which had a collection of 15,000 books. He even had the manuscript of Agam scriptures written in gold ink. Gujarat claims the great Sanskrit poet Magh and the great astronomer Brahmagupta as its own.

In the history of medieval Gujarati literature, the *prabhatiyas* (metaphysical poems) of Narsinh Mehta, the *chhappas* (satirical poems) of Akho, the *akhyanas* (narrative poems) of Premanand and the *garabis* (lyrical poems) of Dayaram are rare achievements. In the history of modern Gujarati literature, Balashankar, Manishankar Bhatt, Sursinhji Gohil 'Kalapi', Balvantrao Thakore, Nanalal, Sundaram and Umashankar Joshi stand out as major poets; Govardhanram Tripathi and Pannalal Patel as major novelists and Manilal Dwivedi, Narmadashankar Mehta and Anandshankar Dhruva as major essayists. Gujarat has claimed two Gyanpith awards – Umashankar Joshi in 1968 and Pannalal Patel in 1986.

**F**or generations to come, Gujarati will be known throughout the world as the language of Mahatma Gandhi. The fact is that Gujarati men of letters have kept a low profile, practising their art in the midst of a very practical people. In 1959, at the Nikhil Bharat Bang Sahitya Sammelan in Ahmedabad, Devesh Das, listening to Gujarati poets at the poetry reading session, said to Umashankar Joshi, 'Gujarati poets exercise great restraint.' Umashankar Joshi answered, 'It may be so. We write poetry in the midst of people who are pragmatic. We would seem absurd if we let our emotions loose.'

A few facts and figures regarding education in Gujarat speak for themselves. There are six universities and 42,000 educational institutions from the primary to the higher secondary levels in which 9,800,000 stu-

dents pursue their studies. Currently, Ahmedabad has half a dozen educational institutions of national and international repute: IIM, PRL, NID, ATIRA, CEPT AND GLI. Literacy levels stand at 60%, which is higher than the national average and makes Gujarat the fourth most literate state in India.

**G**ujarat is not a large state. Its total area is 1,96,000 sq km which is 6% of the total area of India. It has a population of 44,400,000, which is 5% of India's population. Its land is fertile. It is famous as 'Urvisar Gujarat' – the essence of the earth. 60% of the population is engaged in agriculture and 18% in industry. A part of its prosperity comes from the fertility of its land, though a larger part comes from the sea. Gujarat is vertically split, as the poet Nanalal says, 'into two wings – one blue and one green.' The western wing is blue and the eastern one is green with the sea on the west and the forests on the east. There is, therefore, prosperity in the west and poverty in the east.

Of the total population of Gujarat, 7% (3.5 million) are harijans, 15% (6.5 million) are Girijans and adivasis. Thus, they make 22% (10 million) of the total population of Gujarat. In other words, one in five persons in Gujarat is either a harijan, a girijan or an adivasi. Of the total population of Gujarat, 30% live below the poverty line against 40% of the total population in India.

In the 21st century, illiteracy will pose the greatest challenge to Gujarat. The large number of illiterates are a matter of shame and concern. Illiteracy is a man-made evil. It is the root of all other evils, namely poverty and disease. When Gujarat eliminates these three evils, it will be worthy of itself, it will be true to its name 'Garavi Gujarat' – the glory that is Gurjardesh.

# Evolving architectural traditions

R.J. VASAVADA

ARCHITECTURE may be seen as a prism, the three sides of which are culture, patronage and building arts. Culture reflects the way of life at a specified time – incorporating taste, aspirations and social richness as reflected through the artistic and creative expressions of various arts. The patronage of these impulses is an indicator of the need for, and awareness of, collective identity. The building arts are indicative of the level of technological skills and craftsmanship at a specific time.

Prosperous communities took upon themselves the responsibility to uphold the traditional heritage and nurture artistic expressions. Settlements embody the cultural traits of the society that gave expression to them. Our earlier settlements reflect a tasteful, collective expression of will in which community identity and existence shaped social thinking and responsibility. More than material well-being, the welfare of the community was paramount.

Throughout history, western India was subjected to constant pressures. As a result, the region experienced a cultural vibrancy, which makes it interesting for those interested in cultural history. The geographical boundary in which Gujarat is

encapsulated covers a large part of western India and its regional history goes back to ancient times. Archaeological relics are useful since they trace fragments of built-environment providing insights into architectural heritage, which is an important indicator of the cultural status of its people.

Historically, the region was culturally diverse. Peninsular Saurashtra, also known as Kathiawar, was controlled by five different princely states, each culturally different, including their dialects. The early history of this region is marked by raids from external forces and domination by rulers from north India, at times capturing and appointing their own agents to administer it and control revenues. The well-being of people and the prosperity of various towns and settlements depended upon good governance. Such favourable conditions were observed only in distinct periods and it would be interesting to review which of these various phases in the history of this region were productive and left behind an important cultural heritage.

It terms of architectural developments in the Indo-Aryan phase, western India was one of the richest regions. Subsequently, the early 11th



and late 13th centuries too represented an important phase in the region's architectural development. The pre-11th century period was marked by raids from Afghans and the resultant strife. Solanki rule provided the much needed stability and Anhilwada-Patan became an important cultural centre of the region.

Once the Delhi Sultans took over there was relative peace and prosperity. This resulted in the establishment of settled communities practicing trade and commerce. The wealth generated owed substantially to its geographical position on the coast, which serviced major international trading routes. The affluent trading communities diverted part of their resources to create a form of distinct religious architecture, a rich tradition which still exists.

Unfortunately, many of these early creations were destroyed in the succeeding centuries of Muslim rule. From the 15th century this region was once again dominated by Muslim rule following the Moghul takeover, interspersed by brief and sporadic spells of Maratha rule till the British finally took over the administration. Though the princely states in Saurashtra and other parts of Gujarat continued to exist, it was under British suzerainty.

Architecturally, examples of the early phases survive in the coastal areas of Saurashtra and constitute an important heritage. The Muslim domination can be traced from the 15th century and finally there is the immediate history which has shaped our present. The period post the Moghuls is once again marked by a fragmentation and dilution of architectural activity. Overall, the two significant phases have been the Solanki and the later Muslim rule, the latter resulting in the establishment of Ahmedabad.

The rule of the Solanki dynasty from the 10th to the 13th century is

best exemplified by the temples at Sunak, Delmal, Kasara, Kanoda (all 10th century Gujarat); Mount Abu and Kiradu (11th century Rajasthan); Rudra Maal, Vadnagar, Siddhapur, Patan, as also Somnath (destroyed several times in the 12th century); and the Jaina Temples at Girnar (13th century). This phase provides rich examples of civic architecture connected with buildings for public use and other monumental functions. City gates, victory towers, as also buildings connected with utilitarian functions became exemplars of exquisite building craft. Step-wells and *kunds* on trade routes and temple precincts speak volumes of the architectural creativity which continued in later centuries of Muslim rule. The city gates at Jhinjhuwada and Dabhoi (12th century), Ranki-vav at Patan (11th century) are among the most important markers of this period.

The Solanki period saw the evolution of religious architecture with its reflective aspects finding a subordinated expression in the domestic

sphere. The fine temple building traditions in stone structure found their corollary in the exquisitely ornate houses with their timber facades. The resources of the community helped establish a strong and durable religious tradition. This, in turn, led to the development of a flexible, affordable yet exquisite art and decoration in the abode of people and family which stimulated the same feelings as a temple. These traditions survived the Muslim domination of the region and over time constituted an enduring tradition in western India.

The Muslim rule came to terms with the extant communities and their establishments. It also recognized the quality of the prevailing building crafts and the skills of the communities of craftsmen. The 'mahajan' and the craftsmen were both accommodated and made partners by the Muslim rulers in establishing their state and institutions. This mutually acceptable merger, in turn, laid the basis for a strong foundation of a distinct architectural expression in western India, with Ahmedabad and Gujarat as its main centre and region.

This expression was a result of a synthesis reflective of the mutual desire to appreciate and adapt from

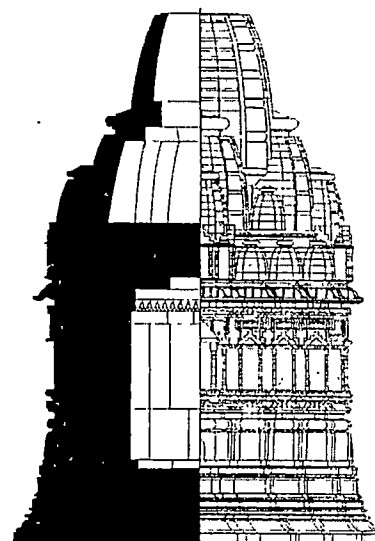
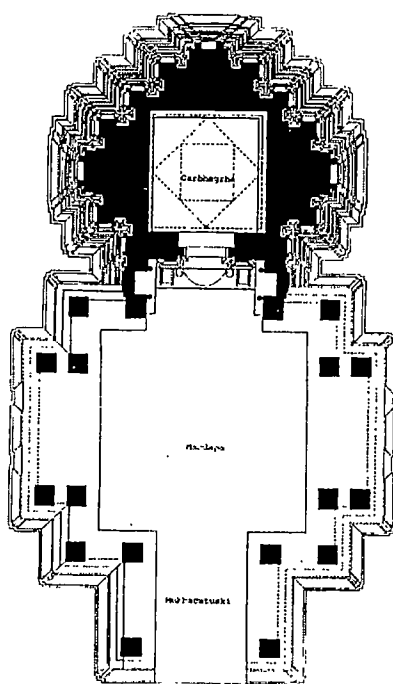


Plate 1: 11th century Shiva temple at Sander near Mehsana in north Gujarat. Example of Solanki period architecture.

both cultures. The building expression displayed the content of one and the form of another, the ideas and needs of one and the craft of another, the patronage of the rulers and the skills and abilities of the local people. It was a partnership in peaceful and prosperous coexistence. This became possible as the local merchant population was at peace and their trading interests were not harmed by the rulers. The rulers in turn were also happy as there was prosperity in the region, crucial for the stability of the region-state. No wonder this phase became significant for architectural development.

**M**uslim architecture under the Ahmedshah Sultans could be categorized in three phases during its two and a half century rule—14th century, early 15th century and the late 15th century onwards respectively. These phases produced some of the most notable structures under the patronage of Sultans, who displayed a remarkable taste for the built environment, as also to establish their might as rulers. Gujarat also provided a favourable climate with its unrivalled crafts resources and building traditions. The Sultans made the best use of these resources in building institutions, both for personal use as well as for the city, especially in Ahmedabad which they established as their capital.

The craft communities, which hitherto were primarily involved in building temples for the local Jaina community, were easily diverted by the rulers to their own works. While adhering to their own codes and canons of architecture based on their traditions, the artisans had to modify these codes to suit the needs of their new masters, who were culturally poles apart. However, the craftsmen did not find it difficult to apply their skills, which assumed the dimensions of patterns, carving and sculptural relief in

place of sculptural iconography of temple architecture with definite symbolic significance.

In fact, since the patterns employed and the decorative filigree was left to the imagination of the craftsmen, their skills in moulding stone could be abundantly displayed. It reached an unsurpassed level of exuberance in the new synthesis under the Sultanate architecture of Gujarat. It was to become one of the most important architectural idiom in the provinces of India. The important centres of this architectural development were Patan, Broach, Cambay and Dholka in the 14th century; Ahmedabad, Sarkhej and Dholka in the first half of the 15th century; and Ahmedabad, Mehmabad, Batwa and Champaner, all in the latter half of the 15th century. The third phase of development under Mahmed Beghara (1459-1511) was the richest period in the evolution of the building arts. Ahmedabad and later Champaner became the centres of architectural developments with a synthesis of the

local and imported traditions. The existing fragments testify to the richness and glory of the achievements in the building arts of that period.

The period of Muslim rule after the 15th century was once again marked by stability with the architectural expression borrowing from the local idioms. There was increased building activity, both religious for Muslims as also buildings for public utilities. In this new architecture the Muslims improvised and drew upon local and indigenous traditions. For example, the mosque was enlarged and included the *mandapa* form as a hall in front of the *mihrab*, with an octagonal shaped plan within a square which was structurally best suited to span the roof with a dome. A local temple would have had a pyramidal roof on top of such an octagonal plan. The *vav* was elaborated into a subterranean resort around a source of water to ward off the summer heat, as in the case of the step-well near Mehmabad.

However, in the later period of the rule of the Moghuls and their

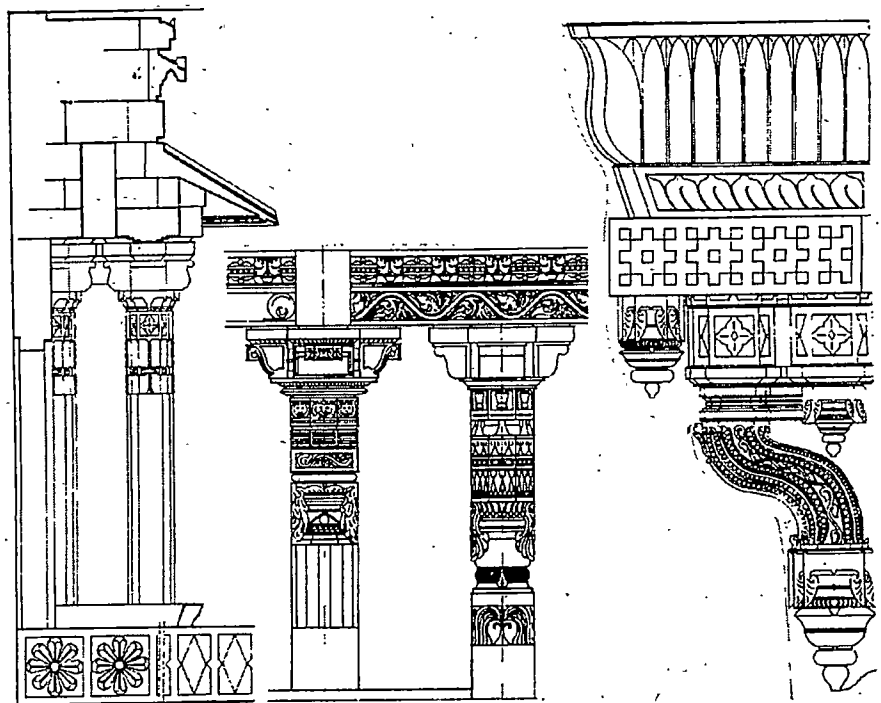


Plate 2: Jami Masjid, Champaner and Sayeed Usman's tomb (Plate 3, on following page). Ahmedabad. Early 16th century examples of the building style of the Ahmedshahi Sultans reflecting fusion of Muslim conception and Hindu execution.

regional administrators, royal patronage considerably diminished. But because of the ongoing support of the merchants and nobility, the building traditions survived. Around the 16th century there was an increased influx of the foreign merchant class which started to make its presence felt. Gujarat was frequented by the English and Portuguese traders and in order to establish their trading interest, both with local merchants as also the Moghul state, they built factories, churches, convents, cathedrals as also fortresses for their settlements and tombs as memorials to their dignitaries. Like earlier invaders, they brought with them their own cultural ideas of the built environment, involved local craftsmen, borrowed local materials and building practices and constructed their own settlements and buildings. Some prominent examples are the towns of Diu and Daman with their lofty and characteristically Indo-Portuguese buildings—an architecture expressive of another synthesis. These building practices, particularly under

more permanent British influences, brought about drastic changes in local traditions and building practices.

The building activities under British patronage were controlled by British engineers who worked as they would have in their own country. Their building activity centred around administrative offices and bungalows or garden house residences for both the British and Indian nobility. Though local materials were promoted for building, the English engineers brought in their brick and stone construction and trained the local *mistrys* to adopt these practices. In lieu of their traditional craft and stucco, brick and rubble work became the new favoured materials and methods which changed the course of building practices in many parts of India.

**T**he new monumental buildings influenced the regional princes and rulers who wholeheartedly accepted the new 'progressive', westernized building practices expressing a strange mixture of oriental and occidental forms. They were stylized and preferential but unlike the earlier building traditions completely lacking an integral character. Important examples of this phase can be seen in Baroda, Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Bhuj, Jamnagar, Junagadh and Morvi. New towns were also planned – Uplata, Goudal, Jamnagar—restructuring the existing townships under the advice of British and European planners and architects in the 19th century. Some of the most remarkable structures of this period can be seen in Baroda (the palace and Baroda college), in Ahmedabad (the Town Hall), and the palaces in Bhuj, Morvi and Wankaner. In all princely towns scores of build-

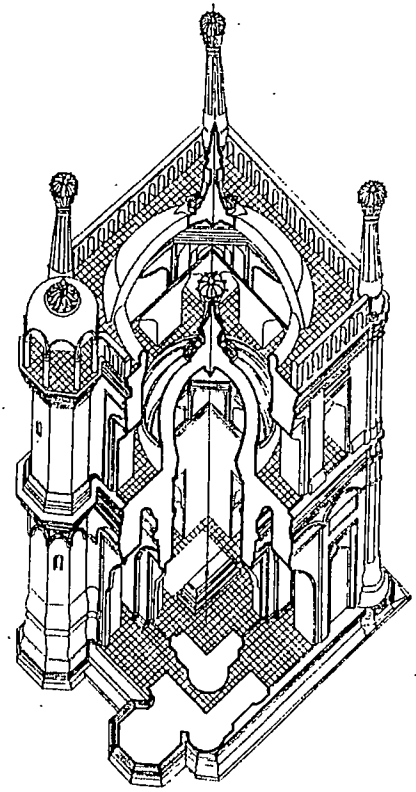


Plate 4: George Oxinden's tomb, early 17th century, Surat. The double layered structure with an open cross dome and corner minarets is reflective of the absorption of local culture in the early colonial period.

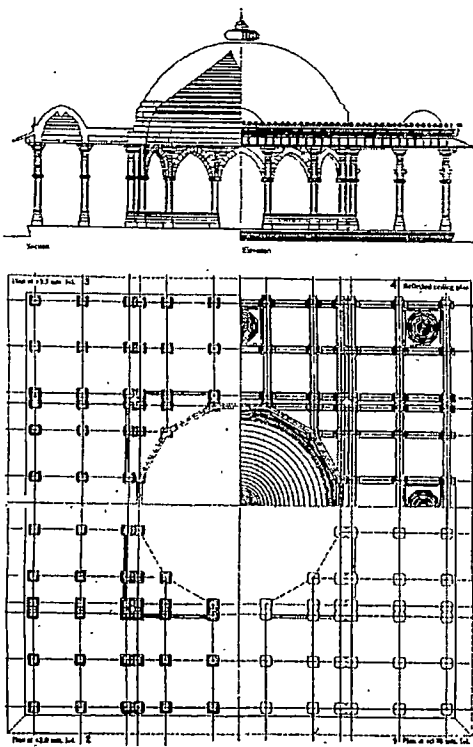


Plate 3: Sayeed Usman's tomb, Ahmedabad.

tions and libraries) were built during this period which stand testimony to the changed attitudes towards the building arts. The craftsmen once again exhibited their innate ability to adapt to the new situation.

The post-independence era witnessed the involvement of European masters to infuse a new spirit in our traditional but changing society. In the later years of the colonial period, Englishmen working in India had neglected local traditions and were unable to revitalize the evolutionary trend. Though some English architects did perceive 'the germs of a movement... which suggest that a trend in the direction of reviving the styles of architecture indigenous to India is in contemplation, and it is hoped that some genius will arise who will combine the beauty and the spirit of the old national art with

the methods and ideas of the new age.<sup>1</sup>

But this was not the thinking of our leadership at the time of Independence. They thought it was necessary to look West to plan an Indian city and its 'democratic' institutions – to inspire the India of the future. They clearly did not believe in what the English architects, after years of experience in India, had come to realise. The new leadership was keen to incorporate the ideas of a modern movement, which were not even acceptable to progressive westerners. The new expression – an alien one – pushed in new materials which were industrial, as also an environment which did not induce any cohesion. However, this was to become the 'universal' vision of the built environment and architecture of the future India.

Gujarat, ever progressive in absorbing new currents, had an elite eager to invite these masters so as to give a new expression to the emerging institutions. By then city authorities and the merchant associations had become powerful patrons and the new cultural institutions promoted by them were looking for new, modern expressions. The advent of modern architecture in Gujarat in the '50s was contemporaneous to that of Chandigarh. Ahmedabad already had a major share of Le Corbusier's

projects worldwide for private houses and institutions.

Modern architecture – individualistic, universal and carrying the designers' imprint – found many patrons. Its aloofness was seen more as a virtue rather than an aberration from the indigenous. As representative of the architecture of another culture, while these buildings displayed qualities of their designers, the format offered was primarily functional. This impacted architectural practice, particularly of the younger generation. Indian architects developed western leanings and associations with the modern movement. The architectural profession soon got disoriented as none of the buildings demonstrated either a seriousness, promise of new interpretations and attitudes, or an appreciation of the real needs of people. New industrial materials were introduced but without the back-up technology that went with them. Local crafts were sidelined. Building activities became labour (as against craft) oriented and the processes became increasingly alienated. Architecture as an art was steadily replaced by building as trade.

The built environment of an era reflects the collective expression of the community and in that sense is embodied in its settlements. The earlier settlements were representative of the community's ideals and way of life. The characteristic urban settlements of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries stand testimony to this attitude in many a town and city of Gujarat. For this reason the wooden facades of houses are a priceless heritage of Gujarati architecture of the last 300 years. Similarly, the symbolic religious architecture from the same era too stands testimony as a source of inspiration

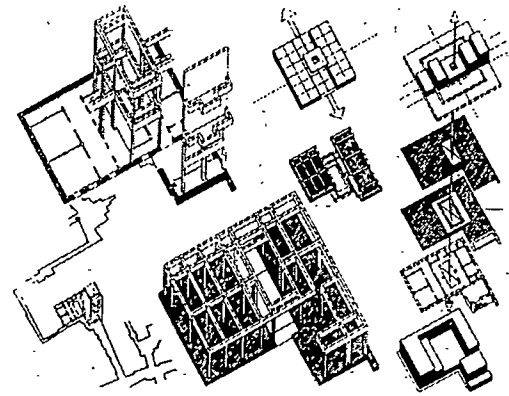


Plate 6: House owned by the Sahaj family, Khadiward, Ahmedabad. 18th century. Note the use of timber for decoration and the embeddedness of the house to the settlement permitting the use of street space as an outdoor community space.

for the community's preferences for the architecture of settlements.

All this was appreciated as long as the traditions were alive. But with the grip of the economic and administrative control slipping into British hands, the social situation was influenced by western attitudes and thinking. The beginning of the 20th century saw the 'development' of almost all towns and cities in Gujarat. It provided a release for the moneyed class to opt for westernized living in bungalows outside the old towns. It resulted in a break from traditional community bound living to more mixed settlements, reflective of the social and economic standing of the residents. This led to the emergence of a new urban middle class with segregated dwellings in a suburban environment, resulting for the first time in a departure from the compact, homogenous living of the pre-British traditions.

With westernization taking firm roots, new institutions were gradually introduced to supplement civic life. The new areas added to the towns virtually became western adjuncts dotted with parks, gardens and enclaves of educational buildings and public



Plate 5: Different pol's in the walled city of Ahmedabad exemplifying community living based on religious togetherness.

1. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture* (Islamic period), D.B. Taraporewala Publication, 1956. p. 127.

amenities. The architecture patronized by the British was obviously a mix of ideas from the West using local masonry and craft-help under British designers and British trained mistrys, what subsequently came to be known as the Public Works Department architecture.

Studying our heritage helps contextualise the present. The contemporary scenario has its roots in the socio-political developments of the previous half century. The

party which led the struggle for independence also assumed power hoping to govern the country with an utopian dream of bringing together a diverse and heterogeneous populace with a long tradition of provincial rule. The old social system was ingrained into people, who identified themselves with a feudal lord or a king and the system worked perfectly in tune with this. Though the economic means were controlled by the nobility, by and large there was a responsible atti-

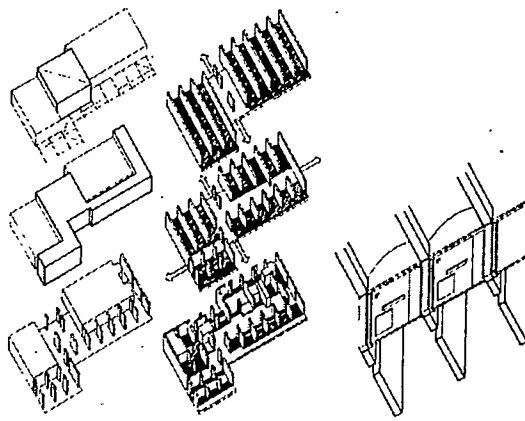


Plate 8: Villa Sarabhai, Ahmedabad, 1950. Architect: Le Corbusier. Example of suburban house. A complete departure from early community living.

tude towards the welfare of common people.

The new party, comprising of freedomfighters whose main aim was to oppose the colonial government, suddenly found itself at the helm of a country whose size was at least 20 times larger than the states in which they lived. The ensuing contradictions are well known. But the most important reason for the deterioration of the built environment in urban areas was the exploitation of land for vested interests connected with the power centres. This was a fall-out of the power that political leaders acquired in the merger of states. Their biggest gain was the ability to take over land by displacing farmers around the urban growth centres.

Land, a critical lever in power struggles, has come under the stranglehold of politicians. Subsequently, building has become an 'industry', a saleable commodity for profit. This is the real scenario of our built environment all over the country and Gujarat is no exception. Land and buildings provide an easy escape route for tax evasion and appropriation of unaccounted wealth, a part of which can also be diverted to the politicians in conjunction with those running the 'industry' in a mutually supportive existence.

It is, therefore, important to distinguish between mere buildings and works of architecture. Every building is not a work of architecture and everyone who builds is not an architect. In the past, architectural design and construction, mind and action, worked concurrently. Often the owner, together with the designer, was directly involved with the construction team. This tradition no longer exists. Probably the split of mind and labour, thought and action, is the result of the social division of labour, just as the need to build and trade buildings as commodities is a consequence of the new political culture.

**T**his separation of means and ownership has resulted in an impersonal environment, a loss of standards, and above all, a loss of cultural exchange which could support healthy and cohesive living. No wonder, when it comes to describing contemporary excellence in the field of architecture, or suggest towns and cities which are reflective of a continuity of historic precedents, we are at a complete loss. What marks today's built environment is a lack of purpose and character.

#### Notes

Plate 1: Measured drawing by Vaagish Nagamir. Diploma thesis. School of Architecture. Ahmedabad, 1998.

Plate 2: Source – Claude Batley's Portfolio.

Plate 3: Measured drawing by Preeti Shah. Diploma thesis. I.E.D. Vallabhvidyanagar. 1993.

Plate 4: Measured drawing by Ronak Mehta. Diploma thesis. School of Architecture. Ahmedabad, 1998.

Plate 5: Documentation by Preeti Agnihotri. Diploma thesis. School of Architecture. Ahmedabad, 1986.

Plate 6: Measured drawing by author and analysis by Preeti Agnihotri. Diploma thesis. *ibid*.

Plate 7: Measured drawings by Brijesh Bhatia. Diploma thesis. School of Architecture. Ahmedabad, 1998.

Plate 8: Measured drawing by Preeti Agnihotri, *ibid*.

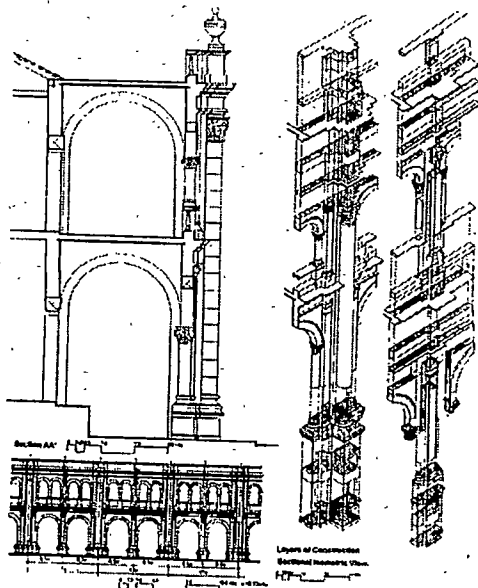


Plate 7: Willingdon Crescent, Jamnagar, early 20th century. The building uses new scales, materials and techniques reflective of strong western influence and a break from tradition.

# My mother tongue

ACHYUT YAGNIK

I share my mother tongue, Gujarati, with the fathers of two nations, Mahatma Gandhi of India and Mohammed Ali Jinnah of Pakistan. With Dādabhai Naoroji, the grand old man of Indian politics and founder editor of *Rastagoftar* a Gujarati weekly started in 1851, I share not only Gujarati as a mother tongue but also the heritage of Gujarati journalism. And with Sardar Patel, I share a common dialect, *charotari*, which is spoken in central Gujarat and considered rustic by the Gujarati *literati*.

While Gandhiji wrote his major works like *Hind Swaraj* and *My Experiments with Truth* in Gujarati, Jinnah hardly ever communicated publicly in his mother tongue. It was only in 1917, and for the first and last time, that he addressed a public meeting at Godhra in Gujarati, at Gandhiji's insistence!

During the last phase of British rule, in the middle of this century, one associated Gujarati with great political personae. But during the early phase of Company rule, in the latter half of the 17th century, the Gujarati language was primarily associated

with the 'Bania' by the East India Company; even the script was referred to as 'Banian'. It was a Bania who took the first step towards printing Gujarati. In a despatch sent to London on 12 January 1676, the president of the Surat Factory wrote:

'The Printing designe doth not yett meet with the successe as expected by Bimgee Parrack, who hath taken great paines and been at noe meane charges in contriving ways to cast the Banian characters after our English manner; but this printer being wholly ignorant therein, and not knowing anything more than his own trade, is noe wayes usefull to this designe; ... Wee have seen some papers printed in the Banian character by the persons employed by Bimgee which look very well and legible and shews the work is feasible: but the charge and teadiousness of these people for want of better experience doth much discourage...'

In 1671, Bhimjee Parekh, a Bania merchant and broker of Surat Factory requested the East India Company in London to send a printer to

Bombay and was ready to pay him 50 sterling a year for three years. This printer reached Bombay in the year 1674; the first 'Bania' characters were cast and Gujarati printing made its beginnings the following year. Unfortunately, no specimen of Bhimjee Parekh's 'printing' has been traceable for the last 200 years, making it difficult to say anything definitive about the 'characters' – whether they were in the Devnagari or 'Bania' script.

The earliest reference to 'Gurjari' or Gujarati script was made in the *Vimalprabandh*, a 16th century Jain text and the earliest known manuscript in the Gujarati script is *Adiparva*, written in 1591-92. During the 17th and 18th centuries, two different modes of writing Gujarati were prevalent. One was the 'Shastri' script, adopted mostly by Brahmins to write about religious matters and the other, the 'Mahajan' or 'Bania' script, commonly used by the mercantile community for accounts and to communicate commercial matters. Without going into the finer details one can say that the Gujarati script is a regional variation of the Nagari script, without the headline.

Since there is uncertainty about the characters cast by Bhimjee Parekh's printer, the advertisement which appeared in the English periodical *Bombay Courier* on 22 July 1797, may be considered as the earliest specimen of Gujarati printing. This advertisement, about the rates of certain merchandise, was issued by the Secretary to the Governor of Bombay. All the characters, including numerals, were in what is today known as the Gujarati script. Fifteen years later, in 1812, a regular Gujarati printing press was started in Bombay by a Parsi entrepreneur, Fardoonji Marzban. He published the first Gujarati book in 1815 and the first Gujarati newspaper,

*Mumbai Samachar* in 1822 which is the oldest surviving newspaper in India.

From its very first issue, published on 1 July 1822, *Mumbai Samachar*'s language policy favoured a composite Gujarati language – a grand synthesis of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, Arabic and English. As the editorial suggests:

'Thirdly, it is known to all that in India the first language that was in common use was Sanskrit and that from it branched out several dialects, Gujarati being one of them. In this Gujarati language, during the predominance of the Moghul power in India, a great many Persian and Arabic words were naturally added. Similarly, now that the British are acknowledged rulers of the country, the language in question has been enriched with an admixture of English words. These Persian, Arabic and English words which are now generally used by the Parsis in common parlance, are not so well understood by the Hindus. Whereas the Sanskrit and Prakrit element which prevails in the Gujarati used by the Hindus is all but unintelligible to the Parsis. In Gujarati there is a remarkable absence of scientific words, and if a few such words do exist in the language, on account of their Sanskrit origin, they are incomprehensible to most people. We propose, consequently, to use such Gujarati in our columns as may be equally intelligible to both Parsis and Hindus. Of course, we could have, if we had chosen, either used pure unmixt Gujarati, or Gujarati having an admixture of Persian, Arabic and English words. But in either case, as we think we have sufficiently indicated above, at least one section of the Gujarati-speaking peo-

ple would have found it rather difficult to understand our language clearly.'

This historical editorial, written before the advent of modern education in western India, gives an interesting outline of the history of the Gujarati language and also a glimpse of the internal tension felt by a speech community regarding the future direction of the language. The tension between 'Hindu' Gujarati and 'Parsi' Gujarati continued for the next 100 years. Till as late as 1930, the debates about 'corrupt' Parsi Gujarati versus 'Sanskritised' Gujarati were regular topics of discussion in Gujarati periodicals.

While this century-long debate and discussion continued in literary and journalistic circles, the ever expanding modern education with Gujarati textbooks put its stamp on 'standard' Gujarati. Obviously, the early educationists were the upper caste Hindus in urban centres like Surat, Bharuch and Ahmedabad. As a result, what is considered 'standard' Gujarati today is in a way a continuity of the language tradition of the urban Brahmin and Bania communities.

An important step towards the standardisation of the Gujarati language was proposed by Mahatma Gandhi himself when, in 1929, the Gujarat Vidyapith published a monumental Gujarati dictionary or *Jodanikosh*. Many controversies about the spelling of Gujarati words were put to rest as Gandhiji gave his blessing to the venture. In 1929 he wrote in *Navjivan* that 'from now onwards no one has the right to spell according to personal liking'. By 1940, the Bombay government too fully endorsed the spelling system of Gujarat Vidyapith with a notification to adopt the same spellings in textbooks. Sixty years after the first edition of this dictionary, a campaign to simplify Gujarati spell-

ing has begun. Today, a state-level platform, with the support of many distinguished educationists, linguists and writers, has advocated a modified and simplified system.

The process of standardisation, which started in textbooks and schools in the 1820s, was followed by the process of complete legitimisation by the middle of the 20th century. The Indian Constitution accorded the status of a 'scheduled language' to Gujarati and by 1960 after the reorganisation of Bombay, Gujarat became a separate state on the basis of its language.

**B**oth Gujarat and Maharashtra should have been bifurcated in 1956 when the reorganisation of states on linguistic lines was initiated. By not bifurcating Bombay state, the Congress leadership invited two parallel mass movements, the Sanyukta Maharashtra movement in the Marathi speaking areas and the Mahagujarat movement in Gujarati speaking areas, which continued for four long years.

The movement was named Mahagujarat to suggest that three areas – Gujarat proper, Saurashtra and Kutch – would together form the proposed new state of Gujarat. As far as Saurashtra was concerned, Gujarati was the common language spoken by more than 90% of the population. But the situation in the Kutch region was different, with 52% of the population speaking Gujarati and 45% Kutchi, which is closer to Sindhi. As Sind province went to Pakistan after Partition, no controversy was raised and as a result Gujarat proper with Saurashtra and Kutch were united under the new Gujarat state.

Before the bifurcation of Bombay, for almost 111 years, a bitter controversy about the adivasi district of Dang and Dangi speech continued in political and cultural circles. Sir George Grierson who headed the Lin-

guistic Survey of India for 29 years considered Dangi as a dialect of Khandeshi-Marathi on the basis of its grammar. The Census of 1921, following Grierson's classification, also considered Dangi to be a dialect of Khandeshi-Marathi. After Independence, the Bombay government, following a visit to Dang by Chief Minister Kher and Home Minister Morarji Desai in early 1949, passed an order declaring Marathi as the medium of instruction in the schools of Dang. This government order met with wide ranging protest from the literary cultural associations of Gujarat and Dang became a subject of politico-cultural controversy. Ultimately, Dang was merged with Gujarat state following a political deal.

**T**he controversy around Dangi speech is significant for more than one reason. In reality, four different adivasi groups – Bhil, Kukana, Warli and Gamit – each with their separate speech traditions, have lived in the forests of Dang for centuries. By the early 19th century, the Dang forest was taken on lease by the Britishers and gradually a creole, called 'Dangi' by British administrators, developed around the main roadlinks. Thus, Dangi was superimposed on the adivasi communities of Dang by the colonial masters for economic and political reasons; later, Gujarati was superimposed for political reasons.

At the turn of the century, modern education was introduced in adivasi areas of Gujarat with Gujarati language as the medium of instruction, first in the princely state of Baroda and later in the eastern tribal belt. Today, compared to neighbouring Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the adivasi communities of Gujarat are more literate due to the early introduction of education. But compared to the rest of Gujarat, literacy levels

of the adivasi communities lag far behind.

According to the 1991 Census, literacy among the adivasis was 29.67% compared to 51.17% for Gujarat and female literacy among adivasis was less than half of the total female literacy rate – 19.55% compared to 40.62%. While there are many reasons for the sorry state of education, of the many handicaps experienced by adivasi students the primary one was the imposition of Gujarati as the medium of instruction in the early stages. This, despite the fact that the Constitution was amended in 1956 (the Seventh Amendment) to include Article 350A which clearly stated that it was the statutory responsibility of 'every state and every local authority to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.'

**L**ike in most of India, adivasi mother tongues were seldom considered the natural medium of instruction in the early standards. This was true even for the Gandhians who started *ashramshalas* for adivasi boys and girls in the 1920s. The first generation of adivasi teachers tried to evolve an appropriate script for adivasi dialects like 'Chaudhary', but they were never encouraged. Even after Independence, no impetus was given to adivasi dialects like Bhili by either the Bombay or the Gujarat governments. Only last year, textbooks in Bhili and Dangi were prepared and a pilot project initiated, though many influential sections of educationists and literati opposed the move.

It is likely that many of the adivasis of Gujarat will increasingly identify with the Gujarati language. Looking at census data on language from 1961 to 1981, it is apparent that



the adivasis of Gujarat have shown little resistance to Gujarati, the dominant language. By 1981, more than 75% of the adivasi population claimed Gujarati as their mother tongue; the ancestral language identity had merged with the dominant language. This is of some significance as adivasis form 15% of Gujarat's population.

**O**n thinking about the future of the Gujarati language, a number of question marks appear on the horizon. The trajectory of the development of the language seem to be moving in different directions. Under the impact of globalisation the upper caste elite of Gujarat, who, ironically, were the moving force behind the standardisation and legitimisation of the language, have shown a greater preference for English and English medium schools. This is equally true for cities like Ahmedabad and Surat and for district and middle level towns.

A hundred years ago, a similar process took place among the Parsis, another community which played an important role in furthering the language. Parsi parents showed a marked preference for English medium schools which they equated with modernisation. By the middle of the century, Gujarati was essentially restricted to inter-generational communication among Parsi families of metropolitan cities.

Now, a gradual distancing from the Gujarati language is underway among the Hindu upper caste elite of big cities. Most of these families have gone through professional and technical education, and the language they speak is a mixture of 'standard' Gujarati with an increasing proportion of English. The situation of upper caste, middle class families in the cities of Gujarat is more complicated. Most of them are neither confident of writing or speaking English, nor are

they able to write 'standard' Gujarati. What they speak is a new city dialect where every sentence is a *khichdi* of both languages.

While upper caste Gujarati families with more than two generations of education have shown a preference for English, families with first or second generation education, mainly from 'backward' caste communities, are moving away from their dialects, showing great reverence for 'standard' Gujarati. For them, sanskritised Gujarati is a marker of upward mobility though often they too prefer English medium schools under the influence of urban, upper caste Gujaratis. Oblivious of the ongoing upsurge of the 'backward' communities, the university and college departments of Gujarati language and literature which are dominated by upper caste Hindus, generally function in ivory towers with antennae directly receiving signals either from the classical world or from the post modernist western world.

**O**utside Gujarat, the largest population of Gujarati speakers in India is in Mumbai, where a sizeable 17% of the population speaks the language as their mother tongue. The roots of this population go back to the same Bhimjee Parekh. He was one of the first Gujaratis to be granted permission from the East India Company for Banias to settle in Bombay to escape forced conversions to Islam in Surat. It was here that the development of the Gujarati press and modern education began and even today all important Gujarati dailies have Mumbai editions. But in the city which once provided fertile ground for the development of the language, Gujarati medium schools are closing down. The trend of using English words in written Gujarati began in the newspapers published from Bombay, a trend

which has permeated all of Gujarati journalism.

**B**esides Bombay, an important centre of Gujarati language in the subcontinent is Karachi. Both were important port cities of the Bombay Presidency and the Gujaratis played an important role in creating their eminent status as commercial capitals. Even after Partition, 7% of Karachi's population is Gujarati speaking, serviced by a Gujarati daily and almost a dozen periodicals. An excerpt from an editorial in the Gujarati periodical *Memon News* of 16 August 1994 reveals the Muslim Memon community's deep feelings for their mother tongue:

'Every community is characterised by its language and dress. If that community has a script, its lustre increases. At the national level, when we discuss language and dress in seminars and meetings, we emphasise the importance of Urdu as the national language and salwar-kameez as our dress. Thus, at the international level, when we want to present ourselves, our language and dress signify our nationality. We understand the importance of this and try to implement it in our life.

Similarly, the regional language also has its own distinct form. Every community nurtures this form and tries to enrich its own language. Language is the cradle of cultural norms and values. One can take the "risk" of preserving one's language, but one cannot commit the "crime" of forgetting it.

As a mercantile community since centuries, we have been nurtured on the bosom of our language and it has never led us astray. In our accounts, education, business dealings and reading-writing, we have been using Gujarati. In every walk

of life we have embraced the Gujarati language.

Despite this, since the last two decades, it seems that we are gradually distancing ourselves from our language. By turning away from Gujarati, we have not gained anything in the cultural sphere. On the contrary, we find ourselves in adverse circumstances. The distance between old and new generations has increased. We see pitiable situations where the father does not understand the son's language and the son understands neither the father's language nor script.'

This yearning for the mother tongue is also reflected in the ever increasing Gujarati speech community in the western world, mainly in the UK and the USA, who would like the next generation to retain its Gujarati identity by learning the language. In the UK, among the population of South-Asian origin, the Gujarati speech community of approximately half-a-million is the biggest bloc followed by the Punjabi speech community. A majority of this Gujarati speaking population reached the UK via the East-Africa route and their speech still retains the flavour of the language spoken in Gujarat during the turn of century when they left for Africa.

**I**n the USA, a majority of the Gujarati speaking families are upper caste Hindus who migrated after the fifties and still maintain close links with their relatives in Gujarat. At home they speak Gujarati studded with English words and would like the younger generation to learn Gujarati. The younger generation is uninterested but their parents, many a time for matrimonial reasons, try to arrange Gujarati classes through their cultural associations or private tuition through senior citizens.

An interesting development took place in 1985 when the US

Department of Education published a list of 169 languages which the government considered to be critical, in the sense that their knowledge would promote scientific research and security – national and economic. 21 Indian languages figured in this list including Gujarati. The US Defence Department funds the study of these languages. Significantly, this list includes languages which do not feature in India's own scheduled list of languages like Maithili, Santhali, Kumauni.

**T**hese are some of the different directions that Gujarati is taking. On the one hand, like the Parsis before them, the upper caste elite is moving away from the language, while their cousins in the West long for their children to be fluent in their mother tongue. So do the Memons, cut off from their roots by Partition. At the same time others sections of society, like the adivasis, dalit and OBC communities are embracing 'standard' Gujarati. While adivasis are abandoning their own language traditions, the dalits and OBCs are gradually moving away from their local dialect base to 'textbook' Gujarati. In other words, a historical transition from the oral to the written tradition has been underway in almost all 'backward' communities. Even among the upper and middle castes, area specific dialects like Charotari, Surati, Sorathi or Halari are gradually being replaced by the urbane Gujarati of the mass media.

As more communities, till now 'voiceless', enter the written order, Gujarati language and literature will witness new thrusts viz., the emergence of dalit and women's literature in the last two decades. These new voices, these new signatures, have brought with them a long-suppressed creativity and will be the fountainhead of the revitalisation of the Gujarati language in the 21st century.

# At the turn of the century

*Looking at the Dalit-Adivasi struggle in a historical context, **Rameshchandra Parmar** and **Ashok Chaudhari** articulate the challenges that face the 'other' Gujarat on the threshold of the 21st century. Rameshchandra Parmar is one of the founders of the Dalit Panther movement in Gujarat and a member of the Presidium of the National Dalit Panthers. He has written a number of books on Dalit issues. Ashok Chaudhari is Vice-President of Vedchhi Pardesh Sewa Samiti, a Gandhian voluntary organisation working among adivasis for the last 45 years. He is also one of the founders of the Adivasi Ekta Parishad and has been associated with the adivasi movement for the last 25 years.*

**AC:** Rameshbhai, what do you think are the similarities and differences between the issues which face two important communities like the dalits and adivasis, particularly in the context of the 21st century?

**RP:** I would begin with the current thinking about dalit, adivasi and other backward communities. Unfortunately, all three communities have no 'history', or some of the roots of their history have either withered away or been erased. Therefore, the intellectuals of these communities are trying to re-establish or excavate these missing roots.

The scheduled castes of today are actually the tribes of the past. Take the example of the Vaghri community, who today are listed among other backward

communities. But their present religious practices revolve around their *kuldevis*. They have nothing to do with Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh. Thus, there are two separate traditions – one, the Brahminic and the other which is practised by the labouring communities. In the long span of history, the traditions of the labouring communities have disappeared or been marginalised.

Many scholars believe, and Babasaheb Ambedkar is foremost among them, that the traditions of the present-day dalits can be traced back to the Harappan culture. After the arrival of the Aryans, the local communities were either defeated or displaced and as a result they were pushed into the forests and mountains where they continued their traditions. But they did not accept the hegemony of the Aryan invaders and offered resistance when attacked.

After a long spell of time, some of them moved closer to the Aryan settlements. They were never given the right to settle inside the village so they lived on the outskirts. In Gujarati, we have a word, *gramlok*, or village people, and these communities on the outskirts were never considered *gramlok*. In other words, those who settled at the outskirts of the village are today's scheduled castes and those who continued to live in the forests and mountains are today's Scheduled Tribes.

All throughout they challenged Brahminic supremacy, though after the spread of the *bhakti* movement we find dalit saints along with other saints chal-

lenging Vedic religion, Brahminic rituals and the caste system.

**AC:** The bhakti movement also made deep inroads in adivasi societies. Of course, some of them even accepted categories like *paap* and *punya* and worshipped gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. But they gave these concepts their own interpretation. Ghulam Maharaj was one such saint in the present century.

All said, adivasis are essentially worshippers of nature. They are *prakruti poojak* and *prakruti moolak*. For them, the elements which are the foundations of life or can be considered life giving, are objects of worship. Other than these, there is no *paramatma*. In Gujarat, we worship the Mother Goddess Kansari and as the word suggests, she is the grain goddess.

Adivasis also celebrate life and consider life itself as sacred. Even today, among the adivasis of Dang, a pregnant woman's husband will not cut a tree or kill an animal in the belief that when one life is blossoming another should not be taken. As a result, every time adivasis encounter organised religion in any form, there is a clash between this basic adivasi outlook on life and the tenets of organised religion, whether it is Brahminic Hinduism or Christianity. It is well-known that since the latter part of the last century, missionaries were active in adivasi areas but somehow these ideological differences were never resolved and continue till today.

I think all organised religions are authoritarian and hegemonistic. Even paramatma is authoritarian. Kings were also considered manifestations of paramatma and their authority was accepted. This contradicts the basic spirit of freedom innate in every adivasi.

Paradoxically, this very spirit of freedom has prevented adivasis from getting organised and offering a united opposition to authoritarianism. The communities who subjugated us, developed not only *shastra* (weapons) but also *shastra* (codified knowledge) to further their expansion. And they have continued in the same spirit today, developing weapons like atom and hydrogen bombs. But we have neither acquisitive nor expansionist tendencies, so we have not gone beyond bows and arrows. Not only is the adivasi way of life different, their approach to life is different as well.

**RP:** I think that the very concept of mainstream Hinduism is recent in Indian history. Even 75 years back there was no concept of a monolithic Hindu society. It was a caste society. In the context of Gujarat, one would refer to someone as a Patel or a Brahmin. Even the idea of defending one's own religion came after the British and the spread of Christian missionary activity.

But coming back to these communities who stayed outside the settled villages, they retained many of their tribal practices, gods and goddesses. But over a period of time a number of practices belonging to the settled villages were also incorporated.

**AC:** I would like to add that most adivasi rituals are performed by women and men play a very secondary role.

**RP:** That is because adivasi societies were matriarchal and we know that the problems started after the coming of patriarchy!

**AC:** Also, in adivasi society there is no concept of women being pure or impure.

**RP:** That is true of dalit society too. Women are not considered unclean or impure during menstruation. Such a concept does not exist.

**AC:** Now let us focus on the changes in adivasi and dalit communities. At the end of the 19th century we find three main changes impacting the adivasi communities. The first was education. In South Gujarat, mainly in the Baroda state areas or 'Gaekwadi' as they are called, free and compulsory primary education was started during the last decade of the 19th century. Later, at the beginning of the 20th century, in the British areas too, hostels were started to encourage education among adivasi children.

**RP:** Among dalit communities of north and central Gujarat too education first came in the Baroda state areas because of Sayajirao Gaekwad. But few know that Sayajirao Gaekwad also started sanskrit *pathshalas* for Dalit Brahmins with a view to facilitate greater assimilation.

The Arya Samaji's also adopted a similar strategy and some dalits were given the status of *pundits* and they officiated at dalit ceremonies. Because of this some Dalit Brahmins, known as 'Garu Brahmins' in Gujarat, learnt Sanskrit *shlokas* including the *Gayatri mantra* and other mantras used in rituals. In this process the secret mystical knowledge traditions, of which the Garos were the traditional custodians and transmitters, was eroded. They even had a secret script in which this knowledge was recorded and transmitted from generation to generation and this too was eroded.

**AC:** In the case of the adivasis, a few years after the introduction of education, the first generation of adivasi teachers emerged and they started thinking of social reform. One also finds the confluence of the bhakti movement and social reform in this generation. When in 1899 the great famine occurred throughout Gujarat on a large scale, tribals lost their lands to moneylenders. Consequently, land issues became important and central to their deliberations.

By the beginning of the first decade of the 20th century, we find the growth of *bhajan mandalis* in South Gujarat. Deviya Bhagat, Jeevan Bhagat of Vedchhi, Sonji Bhagat, Gopalji Bhagat and Tetiya Patel were the pioneers. Bhajan mandalis were not only collectives for singing religious songs but became fora for discussing the burning issues of the day, mainly land issues. Bhajan mandalis became the vehicles of awareness and adivasi leaders increasingly focused on organisational matters. By 1913, Kotla Mehta, Naranji Babar, Tetiya Patel, Amarsinh Gamit, Jeevansinh Valvi and Raisingh Chaudhari initiated the Kali Paraj Parishad. At that time, adivasis were referred to as *kali paraj* or dark people. Later on, in the '20s, this term was replaced by *rani paraj* or forest people.

**RP:** Among the dalits too, early mobilisation took place in South Gujarat around the legendary dalit martyr Vir Mahya. As you know, in the 11th century, the great Chaulukya king Siddharaj built a huge stepwell. But the well was dry and it was said that if a man of exceptional qualities was sacrificed, water would burst forth. After a great search they found one such man, the dalit Vir Mahya. Vir Mahya was ready to give his life, but in exchange for his sacrifice he laid down several conditions for the betterment of his community such as the removal of the broom that dalits had to tie behind their backs and the spittoon around their neck. He also demanded that a part of the harvest be given to them. This dalit charter of human rights was accepted by the king and the community. Thus, Vir Mahya's community of *vankars* or weavers began calling themselves Mahyavanshis. Similarly, the name of the great Saint Rohidas or Ravidas was invoked by the *chamar* community.

Thus, in the early 20th century legendary dalit heroes and saints such as Swami Tejanand, Guru Valmiki and Matang Swami were reinterpreted and re-established and dalits tried to link their identities to them.

**AC:** Coming back to the introduction of education among adivasis. Education brought with it the value system of the non-adivasi world. You know that in adivasi society women and men had equal status, both in daily life and decision-making. But education brought patriarchal values and one can say that adivasi society was not untouched by these. So the status of women declined and they lost some of their earlier authority. Though the spread of the bhakti movement in adivasi areas was also in fact a process of Hinduisation or Brahminisation, leaders in the early

years, like Ghulam Maharaj, tried to reaffirm the equality of the sexes which was inherent to adivasi society.

Throughout the previous century adivasis fought against authority – moneylenders, local officials or representatives of the princely state – but they generally identified the source of injustice at the local level. This is also true of the adivasi areas of the north adjoining Rajasthan. By the second decade of this century, it was realised that the source of injustice was in fact the British empire or colonial rule and the local exploiters or despots drew their power from the British rulers. They realised that the struggle actually had to be directed against the British. This is why the Kali Paraj Parishad decided to invite Mahatma Gandhi.

**RP:** The nature of the dalit contact with the British was different. After the establishment of British rule in Gujarat, British officers needed domestic servants. The upper castes would not enter such service and so dalits became cooks and domestic servants in their households. After retirement, many officers took these servants with them to England or Africa where they prospered economically and educationally.

In South and Central Gujarat, dalits came in contact with Christian missionaries. Many dalits, in search of human dignity, converted to Christianity. North Gujarat was relatively untouched except for the adivasi pockets of Sabarkantha.

Thus, before the coming of Gandhi, the two big influences were Gaekwad and Arya Samaj on the one hand and British officials and missionaries on the other. It should not be forgotten that there was no anti Brahmin movement in Gujarat during the 19th century and we have no parallel to Mahatma Phule or Shahu Maharaj. In the absence of such leaders and movements, most of the dalit educated class was attracted to reform through the bhakti movement or they focused on their respective caste organisations through which they tried to initiate reforms within the caste. A number of dalit castes also prepared their caste constitutions at this time. With the coming of Gandhi, after 1915, many dalits joined the Congress and participated in the Gandhian movement in a big way.

As far as the land struggle among dalits was concerned, it started subsequent to similar movements in tribal areas. In the early '60s, the struggle around land started in Saurashtra and continued for more than a decade under the leadership of the Republican Party. More than 2,50,000 people went to jail and the government was forced to allocate a sizeable amount to feed prisoners. This special allocation was popularly known as 'dalit budget'!

**AC:** Coming back to the entry of Gandhi, the Kali Paraj Parishad invited him in 1919 to their Sheikhpura conference. Kasturba attended instead of Gandhi. I should mention here that by that time adivasi leaders had developed complete trust in Gandhi. Earlier, while they did listen to non-adivasi leaders or visitors, they never really trusted them.

Some adivasi leaders felt that though our ultimate confrontation would be with the British, local struggles against the *sahukars* and landlords should continue. As a result, parallel to the Gandhian movement, another adivasi movement mainly focusing on land issues continued till independence. They also formed organisations like the Adivasi Khedut Mandal or Adivasi Farmer's Organisation. A magazine called *Chingari* (Spark) was started in 1929 which became the organ of the movement. The editor was Jeevansinh who belonged to the Gamit tribe and who had studied till the second year of college. Apart from local news and views, he also commented on national and international developments.

In 1934, they undertook a *padayatra* and submitted a memorandum to the Maharaja of Baroda. There were four demands – land to the tiller, establishment of co-operatives, steps against adivasi indebtedness, and the abolition of penalty on parents whose children did not attend school. For the first three demands they had virtually prepared alternative legislation and specifically demanded their enactment with the implementing machinery.

**RP:** In the '30s, among the dalit textile workers, the most powerful were the *mukadams* or 'jobbers' who were also called masters. The mukadam was not only a textile worker but also recruited fresh labour from the village. Many dalits joined the Majoor Mahtajan on its formation. Some of them became members of the executive committee and were referred to as members. Gradually the power of the masters waned and the members' influence grew since the mill owners were open to the influence of the mahajan who in turn was influenced by the members. Of course, the members were khadi clad Gandhians whereas the masters turned to Babasaheb Ambedkar and invited him to Ahmedabad in June 1928 and July 1931.

During this period the members, who were also dalit representatives in the Congress, were perceived by the common dalit worker as exploiters. Even now, within the dalit community, the term 'member' is used with contempt.

After Independence, two major agitations were initiated by the dalits of Ahmedabad. The first was

around hotel entry and the other around motor entry or entry into city buses. Later, the hotel entry movement spread to Surat, Bharuch and other cities.

The third important agitation was for entry into temples and this was resisted by the Congress leadership, including Sardar Patel. The agitation to enter the Swaminarayan temple of Kalupur turned into an interesting legal battle which reached the Supreme Court. The Swaminarayan temple authorities pleaded that they were not a Hindu sect but an independent sect of their own and therefore outside the purview of the Act! The same stand was taken by Jains and other sects.

I should add that dalits also struggled against *veth* or forced, unpaid labour in both the princely states as well as British territories.

**AC:** Among adivasis too, the agitation against *veth* took place as early as the beginning of this century. As you know, Guru Govind, who had followers in the adivasi areas of the Panchmahal district at the border of Gujarat and Rajasthan, preached not only against liquor and other vices but also exhorted his followers to resist forced labour. This was one of the main reasons which led to the massacre of about 3000 Bhil adivasis in 1912 by the British. This massacre took place on the Mangadh Hills on the Gujarat-Rajasthan border and is almost a forgotten chapter in the history of our freedom struggle.

Rameshbhai, you started with people without history and the story of the Mangadh massacre is an example of the erasure of history.

Coming back to the '40s, militant struggle against land alienation started in South Gujarat. The Kisan Sabha played an important role and Indulal Yagnik, Pangarkar (Maharashtra), Jeevan Chaudhari and Ramji Chaudhari became household names in the second half of the '40s. This Kisan Sabha drew its inspiration from Swami Sahajananad of Bihar. In fact, one section of adivasi leaders from the Songadh area even prepared primitive bombs.

**RP:** This kind of agitation around land issues was never started by the Kisan Sabha in Saurashtra or North Gujarat. I think it took place in the adivasi areas of South Gujarat mainly due to the presence of Indulal Yagnik.

**AC:** In fact, the activities of the Kisan Sabha were initiated in the Songadh area by the same Jeevansinh who started the *Chingari* magazine which I referred to earlier.

**RP:** It is a noteworthy coincidence that in 1938-39, among the dalits too, someone started a magazine called *Chingari* in Ahmedabad.

**AC:** At the time of the Haripura Congress in South Gujarat, when Subhash Chandra Bose was Congress president, the members of the Kisan Sabha organised a rally of 10,000 people and submitted a memorandum to Bose. They demanded an end to the *hali pratha* or bonded labour and land to tiller. Sardar Patel was not sympathetic and told the Kisan Sabha members that they were like mosquitoes which he would crush between his fingers. He added that since it was a Congress session, he did not want to create any problems at the time. Bose, however, was sympathetic and in his presidential address stated that if poor people did not benefit from the freedom movement, then freedom was of no use.

In the same year, on the night of 8 August at Ghulam Maharaj's village, 15,000 Adivasis gathered and resolved to fight for the end of British rule. They met again a week later and this time over 100,000 people attended and resolved to force the British to quit India. This was a historic event, another little-known chapter in the annals of the freedom struggle.

Till the middle of the present century, we find three main streams of resistance among the adivasis. The first goes back to the middle of the 19th century. In 1856, the Bhils of Gujarat revolted against the British. During the 1857 revolt, the Bhils of the Satpura area around Narmada supported Tantia Tope and continued armed struggle till 1860. The second stream can be traced to the entry of Mahatma Gandhi and the participation of tribals of South Gujarat in non-violent *satyagrahas*, particularly the Bardoli *satyagraha*, the Salt *satyagraha* and the Quit India movement of 1942. They went to jail in large numbers.

The third stream which started after the introduction of modern education, mainly under the leadership of Kotla Mehta, continued in the form of violent agitation against *sahukars* and landlords. All these three kinds of agitations continued simultaneously. After Independence, the leadership of all these streams was either crushed or sidelined. Even those teachers and leaders who fully identified with the Gandhian mode and the Congress too were marginalised by the new political elite.

By the late '50s, the natural leadership among the adivasis, which was close to the community and which emerged from the struggles and movements, virtually disappeared from the public space. By the '60s, the established non-adivasi leadership of the Congress projected its proteges and this trend continues in the Congress party even today.

**RP:** After Independence, among dalits there were four important streams of struggle, all of which are associ-

ated with the Ambedkarite movement. Under the banner of the Republican Party, dalits fought a long drawn out battle around the land issue, mainly in Saurashtra.

The second was *dharmanantar* or conversion to Buddhism under the influence of Babasaheb Ambedkar. After 1956, a number of educated dalit families embraced Buddhism to assert their identity. A large section of dalits, including myself, believe that Babasaheb Ambedkar is the only messiah of dalit communities.

The third stream was directed by the new, militant leadership which emerged from *akhada* activity, particularly in Ahmedabad and nearby towns. Akhadas or gymnasiums existed in the pre-independence era and these were further strengthened. The generation which emerged from the akhadas later became the pillars of the Ambedkarite movement.

In the '70s, we see the beginnings of dalit literature, mainly inspired by the Dalit Panther movement. In the last 20 years or so, dalit literature has taken great strides.

In the '80s, the dalit communities of Gujarat experienced two rude shocks. The first was the anti-reservation agitation when, for about 102 days, the upper caste *savarna* communities of Gujarat who opposed the reservation system, perpetuated atrocities in urban as well as rural areas. Dalits started a counter agitation and resisted with whatever capacity they had.

During the second anti-reservation agitation of 1985, the adivasi belt was also involved and their counter agitation was powerful enough to repulse the upper caste assault in their areas. Due to their human geography and numerical strength, the adivasis were able to pay the upper castes back in the same coin. Because of this significant development, for the first time the adivasis and dalits realised that they had to continue their struggle jointly.

The second anti-reservation agitation of 1985 started with the hike in quota for the other backward castes (OBC) or Mandal communities in Gujarat. As a result, the OBCs also realised that the so-called mainstream society was resisting their rise. For the first time in Gujarat, the *avarna* vs *savarna* consciousness emerged where dalits, adivasis and OBCs identified themselves with the *avarna* or the so-called communities of the periphery.

It is noteworthy that the so-called mainstream communities continued their anti-reservation agitation against the Mandal upsurge and simultaneously tried to co-opt *avarna* communities under the banner of Hindutva. These Hindutva forces always mix up Hindu

*dharma* or religion, Hindu *samaj* or society and Hindu *rashtra* or nation. Even in recent times, the systematic attacks on missionaries, missionary institutions, Dalit Christian minorities and Muslim minorities indicate that these forces of Hindutva have become aggressive in an effort to deprive the avarna communities of their rightful share.

I feel that the deprived avarna communities are coming together to demand social justice and this trend will become stronger in the coming years. I am hopeful of their collective struggle in Gujarat.

**AC:** After Independence, as I said earlier, the natural adivasi leadership was marginalised. But in 1957, under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha, a big conference was organised to demand an autonomous adivasi state. More than 50,000 adivasis participated in this historic conference. Indulal Yagnik and B.T. Ranadive were also present. It is difficult to narrate what exactly happened immediately after the conference, but the movement for a separate state evaporated. Maybe the communist leadership was not prepared or perhaps leaders like Indulal Yagnik identified more with the Mahagujarat movement for a separate state of Gujarat.

In the initial period of the Naxalite movement, some of the old Kisan Sabha adivasi leaders supported the movement but they were immediately arrested. When Indira Gandhi gave the slogan *Garibi Hatao* in 1971, some leaders with a militant background decided to support her and thus the Kisan Sabha movement, which started in the '30s, lost its vitality in Gujarat.

**RP:** In conclusion, I would like to state that the movement for *asmita* or the assertionist movement among the dalits, inspired by Babasaheb Ambedkar, is powerful but does not aspire to political power. This assertionist movement has always remained at the periphery of power. At the same time, a sizeable number of educated dalits have joined mainstream political parties and have sought positions of political power. As you know, dalits, on the whole, are deprived and exploited and to get immediate relief try to attach themselves to such figures. Unfortunately, dalit leaders holding powerful positions in the mainstream political parties or the power structure, also try to disempower assertionist movements among dalits. This is why such movements remain weak.

**AC:** During the Navnirman movement in 1974, there was unrest among adivasi students too and they demanded the resignation of Congress leaders who were running educational institutions. In 1981, the entire adivasi belt from Bhiloda to Umergaon res-

ponded to the anti-reservation agitation though very few adivasi government servants and officials extended support. In 1985, these sections too joined the movement. But the limitations of the government and a lack of political will to protect even the constitutional rights of dalits and adivasis was exposed.

I should emphasise that though 1981 is remembered as the year of the counter agitation by dalits and adivasis, in the border areas of Surat and Bharuch the period is remembered as the beginning of the Valia movement which started off as an agitation for minimum wages and subsequently turned into a struggle against land alienation and adivasi right to cultivate forest land. After many twists and turns this movement has taken root in South Gujarat as a resurgence of adivasi assertion focusing on the right to natural resources.

Another dimension was added in the '90s after the Global Earth Summit. For the first time the adivasi struggle established linkages with the global struggle of indigenous and tribal peoples.

I fear that the kind of confrontation which took place in Valia over access to natural resources will only intensify in the coming years, given the climate of liberalisation and globalisation and the emphasis on the exploitation of natural resources. Since adivasi areas are repositories of great mineral wealth and other natural resources, massive industrial expansion has begun in the eastern tribal belt and more and more adivasi families are being ousted from their ancestral lands and joining the army of development and environment refugees. Even in the Scheduled Areas, despite specific laws to prevent it, land alienation is an everyday story.

Looking from this perspective I think that the struggle around basic resources will intensify not only in Gujarat but throughout western India. After Independence, the development model has only increased impoverishment among adivasis. Now, the state and market have come together to further marginalise them.

Thinking adivasis feel that the development model is pitted against them and the New Economic Policy is nothing but another step in that direction. This section has mobilised adivasi communities of western Gujarat under the banner of the Adivasi Ekta Parishad. This organisation has gone beyond the reservation policy or Panchayati Raj Act by focusing on issues which affect adivasi life and survival, such as access and right to natural resources, preservation of adivasi heritage and a change in the value system of society towards sustainable development.



# Factfile

## Selected Statistics for Gujarat and Some other States of India

<i>Item</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Gujarat</i>	<i>Maharashtra</i>	<i>Tamil Nadu</i>
<b>Area ('000 kms)</b>	3287	196	308	130
<b>Population</b>				
1991 (in millions)	846.3	41.3	78.9	55.8
1998 (mill. estimated)	975.0	47.0	89.0	61.0
Per cent increase 1981-91	23.8	21.2	25.7	15.3
<b>Density (persons per sq km)</b>				
1981	273	174	204	429
1991	230	211	257	372
<b>Sex ratio (Males per 1000 females)</b>				
1981	1071	1062	1067	1024
1991	1079	1071	1071	1029
<b>Percent of urban population</b>				
1981	23.7	31.1	35.0	32.9
1991	25.7	34.5	38.7	34.1
<b>Villages 1991</b>				
(a) Number ('00)	5,872	18.0	40.4	15.8
(b) Villages per 100 sq km	18.0	9.4	13.4	12.0
(c) Distribution of villages by population size				
< 500	42.2	21.6	29.0	13.1
500-999	25.0	26.0	31.0	18.1
1000-1999	20.0	30.1	26.3	29.2
2000-4999	10.8	19.0	12.0	26.9
5000 +	2.3	3.6	2.4	13.1

Item	India		Gujarat		Maharashtra		Tamil Nadu	
(d) Average population per village	1061		1501		1198		2325	
(e) Households per village	192		266		229		533	
(f) Average household size	5.5		5.6		5.2		4.5	
(g) % of households with a female head (1993-94)	10.0		5.9		10.6		15.5	
<b>% of population</b>								
SC (scheduled caste)	16.7		7.4		11.1		19.2	
ST (scheduled tribe)	8.0		14.9		9.3		1.0	
<b>Literacy among persons aged 7 and over (%)</b>								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1981	56.5	29.8	62.1	37.0	66.6	39.6	68.0	40.4
1991	64.1	39.1	73.1	48.6	76.6	52.3	73.7	51.3
<b>% of students children aged 10-14 (1991)</b>								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Rural	66.6	44.6	74.2	54.2	79.5	61.5	77.4	62.5
Urban	81.1	73.8	81.4	73.9	87.3	82.7	83.8	79.1
<b>Annual per capita net national/state domestic product at current prices (1995-96)</b>								
	9321		11036		15244		9868	
<b>Average monthly per capita expenditure in 1993-94 (current prices)</b>								
Rural areas	281		303		273		294	
Urban areas	458		454		530		438	
<b>Daily per capita calorie intake (1993-94)</b>								
Rural areas	2153		1994		1939		1884	
Urban areas	2071		2027		1989		1992	
<b>% of households using electricity for lighting(1993-94)</b>								
Rural	37.1		67.5		89.7		54.0	
Urban	82.8		89.7		90.4		81.7	
<b>% of villages electrified Nov. 1996</b>								
	86.8		98.8		99.4		100.0	
<b>% of households reporting adequate food intake throughout the year, 1993-94</b>								
Rural	94.5		97.6		95.4		96.9	
Urban	98.1		98.5		97.7		97.7	
<b>Registered motor vehicles on road (per 1000 pop.)</b>								
31 March 1995	33		68		42		42	
<b>% of area covered by television (1993-94)</b>								
	66.6		65.5		70.8		91.2	
<b>% of population covered by television (1993-94)</b>								
	84.5		77.0		82.7		91.3	

Item	India		Gujarat		Maharashtra		Tamil Nadu	
<b>Vital rates</b>								
Birth rate								
1981-90	32.5		32.0		29.3		25.1	
1991-93	29.1		28.0		25.6		20.3	
1994-96	28.1		26.4		24.3		19.5	
Death rate								
1981-90	11.4		10.7		8.6		10.0	
1991-93	9.7		8.6		7.8		8.4	
1994-96	9.0		8.0		7.5		7.9	
Total fertility								
1970-72	5.2		5.7		4.5		3.9	
1980-82	4.5		4.4		3.7		3.4	
1990-92	3.6		3.2		3.0		2.2	
1995	3.5		3.2		2.9		2.2	
<b>Expectation of life at birth</b>								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1970-75	50.5	49.0	48.8	48.8	53.3	54.5	49.6	49.5
1976-80	52.5	52.1	51.6	53.2	55.6	57.1	53.5	53.4
1981-85	55.4	55.7	55.5	59.3	59.6	62.1	56.5	57.4
1986-90	57.7	58.1	57.0	58.8	61.2	63.5	60.6	60.6
1989-93	59.0	59.7	59.0	61.1	63.0	65.4	61.4	63.4
<b>Mean age at marriage (years) 1991</b>								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
All areas	25.2	19.6	24.5	20.3	25.8	20.0	27.0	21.3
Rural areas	24.5	18.0	23.9	19.8	24.8	19.0	27.0	20.8
Urban areas	27.0	21.3	25.9	21.3	27.1	21.4	28.4	22.1
<b>Workers per 1000 population in terms of usual status</b>								
1987-88								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Rural	53.9	32.2	55.9	38.1	54.6	46.2	58.7	46.1
Urban	50.6	15.2	51.0	11.2	49.6	15.9	55.8	22.7
1993-94								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Rural	55.3	32.8	57.4	39.6	55.1	47.7	60.2	47.8
Urban	52.1	15.5	53.5	14.2	52.6	16.9	57.5	23.0
<b>Industrial distribution of workers in terms of usual status 1993-94</b>								
Rural areas								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Primary	74.1	86.1	71.1	90.6	75.3	91.2	63.9	78.5
Secondary	11.2	8.5	16.2	5.7	10.8	4.4	17.3	13.8
Tertiary	14.7	5.6	12.7	3.6	14.0	4.4	18.8	7.6
Urban areas								
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Primary	9.0	24.7	4.9	20.9	6.4	19.1	8.3	12.2
Secondary	32.9	29.1	42.1	25.7	34.6	22.7	37.6	38.4
Tertiary	58.1	46.2	52.9	53.4	59.0	58.2	54.0	49.4

Sources: National Sample Survey Organisation, Reports Based on the Fifth Quinquennial Survey, 50th round, July 1993-94. *Statistical Outline of India 1997-98*, Tata Services Limited, Department of Economics and Statistics, Mumbai.

# Books

**ON THE SALT MARCH: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi** by Thomas Weber.  
HarperCollins, Delhi, 1997.

IF there is one event from the pre-independence era which continues to capture the imagination of people, commercialised though it may have become in recent times, it is the Salt Satyagraha. In 1930, Gandhi and 78 others set off on a 25 day march from Ahmedabad to Dandi to break the salt laws and start the fight for *purna swaraj*. While scholars continue to quarrel about whether or not the satyagraha enjoyed mass support, the event has become a popular symbol of patriotism and sacrifice, finding mention even in Hindi film dialogues.

After Independence this event has been restaged numerous times, the first in 1970 when a group of students from the Gujarat Vidyapeeth walked to Dandi to mark Gandhi's 100th birth anniversary. Since then ordinary citizens, foreigners on cycles, social activists protesting against iodised salt and multinational salt companies, and even one of our prime ministers have re-enacted this event. The most recent staging was in March this year, flagged off by the lone survivor of the

original group. This time it was to celebrate 50 years of Independence. For this occasion, Gujarat's tourism department began a six-day package tour starting in Ahmedabad and ending in Dandi. 'Taste the spice of the Indian Independence Movement walking with the Mahatma to Dandi on the Salt Satyagraha,' goes the advertisement.

Thomas Weber made the trip in 1983. He walked along the same route, leaving at dawn on 12 March, stopping at the same villages and making salt from seawater on the morning of 6 April, just as Gandhi had done. But with a difference. Juxtaposed with the narrative of his experiences along the way (a chapter for each day) is the account of the very same day in 1930. Weber's aim was not merely to retrace Gandhi's steps but to document Gandhi's thought processes, the drama and atmosphere, as well as the experiences of those who were touched by the event.

There are books galore on the Dandi march but no other account gives the reader such a feeling of proximity to the past. Gandhi's struggle to find an issue, his choice of salt, his decision to march, the selection of the route and marchers, preparations for the actual event and what happened on each day *en route* – all

this is vividly sketched. With a sense of humour, he describes how the volunteer band which was to see Gandhi off began to play 'God Save the King' before realising its mistake and subsiding into confusion!

Weber has also unearthed the minutest details – the menu at each village halt, where Gandhi lost his temper, whether he actually walked as fast as he is supposed to have, and how the famous photograph of Gandhi bending to pick up salt was not snapped at Dandi but at a nearby village. All this makes the reader feel that he (or she, though Gandhi did not allow women to join) is one of the marchers too.

The simultaneous narrative of Weber's experiences while walking the same route provides a fine counterpoint with the situation some five decades later. His meetings with people along the way, their memories of the day Gandhi passed through their village, what he said to them, the atmosphere then – all this comes alive. So does the lack of knowledge about the villages' history among present-day youth, the un-Gandhian lifestyle of formerly staunch followers and their emigration to the West.

Weber has accomplished this through painstaking research at archives and libraries, diligent cross-checking and, above all, through conversations with the surviving marchers and people in villages along the way. This is the real strength of the book and his contribution to the historiography of Gandhi's march to Dandi. All other accounts, including that by Judith Brown who is considered an authority on this satyagraha, only quote Home Office files, police and newspaper reports or at best Gandhi's own writings or those by other prominent politicians of the day. The Gujarati versions are mostly nationalist clones. No scholar writing on this subject has combined archival material with oral history so seamlessly and readably. Probably the only exception is Professor Dalton at Columbia University, whose engagement with the salt satyagraha goes back to the sixties and who had the advantage of interviewing many of the original marchers while they were still young and their memories fresh.

Paradoxically, the book's strength is also its weakness. Weber had the unique chance to meet the actual people associated with the event. Yet, he has left many important aspects unexplored. He has not, for instance, attempted to seek out dalits or Muslims or women along the way, thus losing an opportunity to reveal the real nature of Gandhi's mobilisation. He was probably unaware that apart from these groups, another significant section of society from whom

Gandhi received support during the satyagraha were the adivasis. Their contribution remains unacknowledged, not just in this work but in most others.

Most scholars agree that the key achievement of the Salt Satyagraha was the emergence of women into the arena of the freedom movement. Yet, apart from the 105 year old Gangaben, Weber did not speak to any women along the way. In 1930, she led the picketing against liquor shops, but Weber's conversation with her reveals more about the cooking arrangements at the Sabarmati ashram. What motivated women, where did they draw the courage to overcome traditional restrictions, leave their homes and help their menfolk to boil seawater, join pickets or court arrest? What drew them to Gandhi? None of these or other aspects related to the entry of women into the movement features in the book.

Nor has Weber thrown any light on the dalit question, though he does note that concurrently with the Dandi march, the harijan community had initiated temple entry campaigns in Bombay, Nasik and Poona. Indeed, they threatened to launch a counter satyagraha against Gandhi because they felt that he had sacrificed the interest of 'untouchables' for the sake of *swaraj*. They even planned to block the removal of 'illegally manufactured salt' by placing their 'polluting' bodies in the way of volunteers.

Weber did meet two of the 'untouchable' members of the original group. But here too he provides no insights apart from the fact that one of them was jovial and the other a good musician. What was it like to be an 'untouchable' marcher in caste-conscious Gujarat? Did they receive the same treatment as the others along the way? What were their memories of dalit issues and leadership of the time – Weber has not discussed these aspects. Nor did he seek out dalits in the villages he passed through (though on day four of his march he had vowed to 'engineer closer links with the less affluent on this trip'). Not even in Gajera, where Gandhi made a point of refusing to speak unless the untouchables were allowed to join the general audience, or at Rayma where a harijan returned the land he had received from the government. A few interviews with the dalit elders of such villages could have provided a valuable first-hand account of the dalit response and contribution to the Salt Satyagraha.

Equally distressing is the silence on the Muslim question. Weber rightly observes that the Salt Satyagraha failed to cement deteriorating Hindu Muslim ties. One wishes that he had talked to some Muslim elders on the way, specially in villages like Napa,

Buva and Jambusar where they were present in sufficient numbers and inquired why they did or did not attend the public meetings as also their impressions and assessment of the event. Weber met Abbasbhai, one of the two Muslim marchers, but there is nothing which reveals Abbasbhai's feelings about being a Muslim in Gandhi's movement or his memories of the general antipathy of the Muslim community towards Gandhi. The book's detailed day to day descriptions reveal that Gandhi tried to use examples from the Koran to woo Muslims. A few interviews could have revealed what Muslims felt about this.

It does appear that the bulk of Weber's interviews were limited to elderly, upper caste Gandhians. But even with this group he has remarked but not reflected on the decay in Gandhian values. The reader is left wondering as to why these former Gandhians subsequently turned to the West and to materialistic lifestyles. What does this generation of freedom fighters think of the erosion of these values in their own lives, values for which they were ready to risk everything earlier. Weber has left this interesting aspect unexplored.

This reviewer felt a sense of disappointment at these omissions in an otherwise significant book. More so because Weber was probably the last person to meet this generation of people while they were still in good health and able to respond to questions about the past. The opportunity to fill these gaps in our understanding of this important satyagraha is lost forever.

Suchitra

**INDIGENOUS CAPITAL AND IMPERIAL  
EXPANSION: Bombay, Surat and the West  
Coast** by Lakshmi Subramanian. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Lakshmi Subramanian's work was first noticed when her articles and subsequent responses were published in the journal *Modern Asian Studies* in 1991. Ever since her book had been eagerly awaited. The book deals with trade relations and the new trading order as it emerged in the 18th century on the west coast of India in exhaustive detail.

Surat has been a focus of successive studies as the nerve centre of international and inland trade and finance during medieval times. M.N. Pearson, Furber, and Ashim Das Gupta chart the history of Surat from the 15th to the middle of the 18th century. Subramanian's work recounts the developments of the 18th century, bringing Surat's story upto the 19th century.

This story parallels that of medieval India. The decline of the social and political order under the later Mughals, the rise of the East India Company, the decline of textile production and the growth in export of raw materials – the success of colonisation. Unlike the well documented rape of Bengal, the collaboration of the west coast has received scant attention. Subramanian details the western Indian collaboration, identifies the individuals and documents the profits within a macro frame. She even manages to lay bare the compulsions behind the collaboration, the weaknesses of the Company, and the way the 'natives' made money at its expense.

With the disruption and decline of inland trade due to the Maratha-Mughal wars, the financial wealth of the bania shroffs became idle and they were on the lookout for alternative investments. Since the English East India Company was somewhat behind with its revenue collections in Bengal, it urgently required additional finance. For the banias, the Company's desperate need and its liquidity position ensured a favourable rate and assured return, thus proving a most profitable source of investment.

The Company used the finances for the development of Bombay Presidency – the expansion of territory, war with the Marathas, providing protected shipping for the local merchants, and above all for investment in cotton which it exported to England and China. The export of piece-goods continued, but since the weavers were tied to the banias and traders who advanced finances, they were coerced to sell to the Company as the sole buyer, thus unable to negotiate favourable prices and remuneration.

Subramanian details the financial transactions well. In contrast to the confusion and dissension among the Indian merchants and rulers, the Company comes across as determined and single-minded in its pursuit of profit and success. This single-mindedness is complicated by the differences between Company officials in Surat, Bombay and Calcutta, which makes her account complex and contingent rather than deterministic.

In addition to outlining the economic changes, the author documents the rise of a new social order. This social order, she assures us, resulted from the collaboration between the British Company and the banias. The rise of the trading class and its economic strength is contrasted to the decline of the artisanal class in Surat. The latter decline is linked to the disorderly and lax administration that could no longer police the city. With the Company taking greater steps for the security of the traders and subsequently

even the judicial function, order is described as being 'restored'.

Her treatment of social displacement requires careful attention as it purports to explain the birth of a new Surat. On the one hand she sets up the bania-trader as Hindu and the displaced militia and artisan as Muslim. On the other, she describes how the artisan groups of Surat were both Hindu and Muslim. The list of weavers groups included Hindu castes – the Khumbees, Khatris, Malwae and Pancholees – Muslims, Boras and Bhandarees (a Muslim caste), and Parsees: (Table vii, pp. 209-210, weaving occupation structure in 1795.) Clearly, the artisan class was far from exclusively Muslim, even though there was community specific specialisation. Nor did the residential patterns follow communal lines. The same *mohallahs* housed bania and Muslim residences (p. 212).

Nevertheless the author classifies the riots of 1788 and 1795 as communal, involving disaffected Muslim artisans and military classes attacking the collaborationist Parsees and banias. On the one hand she cites economic dislocation, and on the other religious sympathies. The immediate provocation was the tying up of a Bengali Muslim Syed of a mosque. The attack, therefore, is framed as retribution by Muslims on Hindu banias.

Though the scenario is neatly and convincingly laid out with a right mix of economic and social-cultural factors, the question remains: If the artisans were disaffected, did the Hindu artisan castes also join the attack? Were they separately dealt with? According to the author, the Muslims raised the slogan of *char yaree*. This was a Sunni slogan. What about the Bohras, who are Ismaili Shias? They were also successful traders. How did they fare in the riots?

Since the 'communal' explanation does not cover all angles, is it at all fair to use it? Subramanian foregrounds the social changes as an explanation for the 'riots' of 1788 and 1795. She categorises the riots as Hindu-Muslim and thereby communal. In today's surcharged atmosphere, labelling a riot or conflict as 'communal' demands sensitivity, otherwise parallels are drawn with modern events. A failure to do so only fuels the 'civilisational enmity' thesis that justifies all communal conflict and discrimination.

The social-structural changes the author discusses, though a welcome addition to a work that otherwise concentrates on tracing the financial deals in the market, are nevertheless inadequately dealt with as the scholar is primarily interested in the world of finance and trade.

The importance of the 18th century with the availability of local capital would have been highlighted had it been contrasted with the 19th century with the dominance of the European companies, agency houses and traders. Subramanian's story provides the backdrop from where it is possible to question the inevitability of colonisation.

While questions like 'what might have been' are rather pointless, it would be worthwhile to examine and assess processes of indigenous finance and draw connections between bullion flows and changing ownership of capital. Despite Subramanian's careful attention to the events of the 18th century financial world, her account does not assess the developments in Surat in terms of the story of colonisation. It seems as if she has shied away from drawing long term implications.

**Amrita Shodhan**

**FEEDING THE BANIYA: Peasants and Usurers  
in Western India by David Hardiman. Oxford University Press, 1996.**

David Hardiman has made western India and Gujarat in particular his favourite area of study and research. He has already published extensively on different aspects of the region. The present book is an exhaustive and in-depth study of usury (usurers, banias, moneylenders) in the region, including the relationship between the bania usurers and their clients, the peasants. He deploys a variety of concepts – 'hegemony' (Gramsci), 'dominant discourse', 'hidden transcript', 'cultural notions of debt and credit in peasant societies' (Bourdieu), 'forming principle' – with reference to 'the interplay between knowledge of the structure and the actual practice of power in that sphere' (Foucault). He combines social, religious, political and economic aspects of usury with the points of view of both the bania or *sahukar* as exploiter and the peasant/labourer, the borrower and the victim.

After examining the historical meanings of usury in both western and Indian traditions, the author defines usury as 'an exploitative relationship in which the creditor has power over the borrower. The creditor has control over capital, which is advanced to subordinates, who in turn have to pay interest on the loan, which can be in kind, in money or in labour.' At the same time, in the context of the (western) Indian tradition which he has researched in detail, he emphasises that the relationship is not merely of 'the exploiter and the exploited' but rather of 'the patron and the client'

as well, one in which both parties respect the social values intertwined in this relationship. This, he explains, is what often saved the bania from violence and death, including during disturbances and rebellions against usurers.

He details the history and practices as well as the economic and political position of usury in the pre-colonial and colonial periods (chapters 2, 3 and 13) and in the post-colonial period (ch. 14), and explains the post-independence changes by what he calls the 'metamorphosis of usury' (ch. 14).

In the pre-colonial period the baniya, to sustain his 'hegemonic' role, had to depend on the social values and practices as well as the accepted moral and cultural norms and values. The colonial regime saw the baniya as its ally, given his ability in some areas to collect land tax, either directly or by advancing cash to the peasants at the time of land revenue collection. Consequently, the colonial regime consciously tried to improve his position in society by providing better institutional and infrastructural facilities like civil courts, recovery laws, law decrees, legally backed confiscation of goods and land-holdings. This greatly enhanced the power and domination of the usurer. But, Hardiman points out, the baniya and his institution of usury were not allowed to become collaborating partners of the colonial rulers.

The Time of Account (ch. 9) provides a socio-economic and cultural background of the society in which the baniya operated. It describes the banias' accounting practices the various methods of subterfuge and manipulation which perpetuated his dominance over a peasant client. The manipulations of the institution of law are also amplified. For the peasant, this is akin to a fly walking into the spider's web. The state may, in an attempt to be fair to the peasant-borrower, a weaker party in this game of exploitation, prescribe various safeguards; but the bania's *modus operandi* only improves with time and new challenges.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 deal with the times of tension in rural society. Colourful accounts of the protests and rebellions against the banias (sahukars) in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan are furnished. The author stresses that the relationship between the baniya and the peasant borrower was not purely antagonistic and/or confrontationalist. There was a significant paternalistic, patron-client bond, a relationship which continues. This is what saved the baniya from physical violence. The revolt took the form of burning books of account and debt bonds, seen as the evidence and symbols of unjust oppression.

The author while discussing the causes, effects and methods of peasant resistance to usury has argued successfully against the thesis propounded by N. Charlesworth ('The Myth of the Deccan Riots of 1875', *Modern Asian Studies* and *Peasants and Imperial Rule: Agriculture and Agrarian Society in the Bombay Presidency, 1850-1935*, Cambridge, 1985) that the Deccan riots of 1875 were similar to the 'grain riots' in Europe.

The western Indian riots were essentially against the oppression of usury and the refusal by the usurious class to do its bit by the poor peasants in times of famine or near famine. The riots (and the less than extreme results) were thus directed against the usurer choosing to upset the paternalistic client-patron relationship, just when it was most needed.

The author argues that these struggles revolved around what the peasant debtors saw as 'unrighteous behaviour' on the part of the banias, considered superior to the peasants in the social hierarchy. But he does not probe all the aspects of the banias' practices on such a scale of righteousness. Neither does he explain why the peasant borrowers do not apply these standards during normal times.

Chapter 14 describes the development of usury in the post-independence period, the 'metamorphosis of usury'. Simply stated, the baniya proved adept at successfully cornering the new economic and social opportunities created by development.

The new measures providing larger rural credit at reasonable rates of interest and conditions of repayment with protection to the borrowers were evolved on the basis of studies and surveys conducted by government bodies and institutions. One such study spawned a slogan: 'Cooperatives have failed; Cooperation must succeed.' Typical of the mentality of the educated middle-class elite that dominated bureaucracy and technocracy after Independence. The slogan generated a feeling that half the problem was solved; the other half was to be solved by the momentum generated in action by the slogan. Nothing of the sort happened. As a matter of fact, the slogan ironically succeeded in a reverse way: 'Cooperatives succeeded, Cooperation failed'!

Cooperatives were established for supplying credit in the rural areas; purchase and sale of expensive, modern farm implements; supplying seeds, fertilisers and pesticides; marketing of agricultural produce and so on. The baniya moved into the sphere of marketing the new implements and machinery, fertilisers and seeds. When the cooperative society



assumed importance in rural India because of support from the political system the baniya moved in and took control, given his superior commercial skills and contacts with the large land-holders. The cooperatives thus come to be dominated by the rural rich who now also included, besides the baniya, rich land owners with surplus funds generated over periods of scarcity and then the green revolution. The poor peasant, for whom the slogan was devised as a solution, found himself a member of the cooperative, but only for the purpose of exploitation with better institutional and now open political support for the exploiter. Thus, any institution devised in the modern economic and political system, ostensibly to overcome the ills of usury, is transformed and co-opted by the rural rich. The traditional ways of exploitation are retained (the traditional baniya usury continues for both the small peasant and the landless labourer) and are refined into new ways and institutions to suit the dominant classes.

Hardiman does not offer any solutions. The present economic situation and the policies/programmes/actions of all the political groups hold little hope for rural India where usury would be a thing of the past. Borrowing, which does not lead to an increase in the earning/paying capacity of the borrower, only creates a debt-trap which suits the usurer. As long as this non-productive borrowing is essential to the peasant, the usurer will remain indispensable.

In a regime of small and marginal farmers, uneconomic holdings and subsistence agriculture, usury will continue. The bania will progress and devise new and more efficient ways and institutions to continue his oppression and domination. Unless the small and medium peasant's (and also landless labourer's) need for emergency and unproductive borrowing is eliminated, one cannot see the back of the baniya. Land reforms are welcome, but, let it be clearly understood, insufficient. Land reforms cannot reduce the number of small, marginal, subsistence farmers. Similarly, rural agro-industries: the growth of sugar mills and sugar cooperatives in Surat district in Gujarat (one of the prime areas of the author's study) has not made a significant dent in the situation.

What is required is large scale industrialisation, an emphasis on labour-intensive, small and medium industrial units and agro-industries to provide employment in the off-season months. That would significantly relieve the pressure on land. Last but not least, the spread of education and awareness among the poorer sections in the rural areas about spending habits (which is possible only through social reform move-

ments by voluntary organisations like those in the Gandhian era) is the direction in which rural society and the country must move.

In this age, when most government funds, five year plans, rural schemes included, are deployed either for providing large subsidies to the dominant and exploitative large farmers and rural rich or for building or creating infrastructural facilities like cheap irrigation water and near free electricity, all talk of sympathy for the rural poor or debt-burdened small farmers is not just hypocrisy but downright dishonesty and cheating. The large increase in the population below the poverty line to more than 300 million (equal to the population of India at the time of independence) is adequate proof, if any is needed, of the total failure of our economic and social policies.

**B. J. Desai**

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT: The Plague in Surat** by Ghanshyam Shah.  
Sage Publications, Delhi, 1997.

MOST of us, more so our policy-makers, are blessed with a notoriously short memory. In an environment suffused with uncertainty, serving fickle political masters does seem to contribute to a fire-fighting mode of crisis appreciation and management. So while our frayed institutions do sometimes manage to rise to the occasion, they rarely generate a learning mode which could help them prepare for potential eventualities. Even fewer develop longer term strategic perspectives and plans of action.

In the early years many looked up to Gujarat as an efficient state. Relative political stability and a competent bureaucracy ensured that systems functioned. Not to be forgotten was the contribution of Gujarati society, particularly through its many voluntary organisations. Not so now. The recent 'mishandling' of the cyclone that hit coastal Gujarat is a telling reminder of how disasters assume cataclysmic proportions in situations marked by a decay of both formal (political and administrative) and voluntary institutions.

Many today may have forgotten the outbreak of the 'plague' that hit Surat in September-October 1995. As Gujarat's fastest growing city in the decades of the '70s and '80s, Surat was a booming town. The Bombay textile strike of the early '80s gave a major fillip to the powerloom sector and the associated printing and dyeing trade. The city was also a major centre of the diamond polishing industry.

Economic prosperity attracted migrant labour by the thousands, most of whom were accommodated in the city's burgeoning slums. Wealth, much of it unaccounted, contributed to a building and consumption boom. Unfortunately, in this 'get rich quick' boom town, little attention was paid to the development of planned infrastructure; even less to the evolving of mechanisms to oversee and direct the rapid growth and expansion.

Ghanshyam Shah's insightful action-research study of the outbreak of the 1995 plague and its aftermath locates the handling of the epidemic in the socio-economic background of the city and its populace. Though the disease was controlled within a week, the ensuing panic resulted in a large section of people, particularly the migrant population, vacating the city. Rarely did the outsider observer realise that most of the 'victims' came from this strata.

If anything, the migrant poor were doubly victimised. For a start, they lived in abysmal conditions. They also had to remit a part of their earnings back home. They, unlike the native poor, had few networks and solidarity mechanisms to help cope with the crisis. Above all, when the epidemic struck, like during the communal outbursts of 1992-93, they could more easily be branded as being responsible for the decay of the city.

Shah's study is much too rich and empirically nuanced to present in a brief review. But when a seasoned political sociologist looks at a 'health' disaster – the run up to it and the aftermath – the reader gets glimpses of much more than disease control and disaster management. We learn how different strata of the society perceived and responded to the crisis; how local communities used 'primordial' links of kinship and caste to cope. But most of all, how the extant political and administrative system was so out of sync with the need of the times.

Some of the above comes out sharply in the post-script on post-plague Surat, particularly in the efforts of its new municipal administrator, S.R. Rao. The plague outbreak severely damaged the reputation of Surat. It also pushed the 'powers-that-be' into giving city administrations a relatively free hand to improve the urban area, a move which acquired a greater impetus because of the need to meet the challenges of liberalisation. It was understood that private capital would be difficult to attract in a filthy, ill-managed city prone to health disasters.

The saga of S.R. Rao and how he turned Surat from one of Gujarat's filthiest cities to the second-

cleanest city in the country (after Chandigarh) is well known. Political and administrative will, when backed by public support, can do wonders. This, even when the political masters were reluctant to shed their proclivity to both intervene and appropriate credit. So Surat managed not only to clean up its garbage, straighten out roads, demolish unauthorised structures, but also attempted to put into place systems of public involvement and scrutiny. The story carries many lessons – particularly about how to enthuse unwilling municipal employees. It also demonstrates the need for harsh measures, often difficult to enforce, not just because of union pressures but because interventions have to steer through a complex web of political loyalties and patronage.

Ghanshyam Shah points out, and tellingly, the underside of this success story. First, while the memory of the plague was fresh, people behaved. After a gap, the tendency was to return to the old ways. How to continually enthuse pride in one's civic space and thereby ensure performance remains a challenge. Charismatic leadership helps but is no substitute for durable systemic efforts. Second, the 'success' had a clear class bias. Much less effort was expended in areas of working class (particularly migrant) concentration – be it for work or living. So, one should not be carried away by the surface improvements. Both media and official attention is focused on the accessible spectacular. Like with the recent landslides in Rudraprayag, where local villagers were all but forgotten in the rush to locate the Mansarovar pilgrims, the faceless unnamed in Surat suffered benign neglect. Third, the activation of the official machinery seems to have diminished voluntary enthusiasm. Thus, few groups were willing to take over and work in the slum areas in a sustained way.

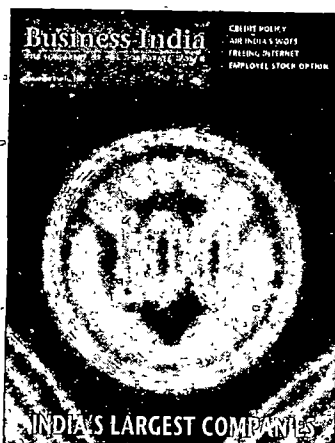
The last may come as a surprise to those who have viewed Gujarat as the land of Gandhi (and thus voluntarism). I think what it demonstrates is that the voluntary sector in Surat is ill-equipped to adapt to a shifting environment.

Overall, this is an extremely useful book. It underscores the importance of environmental improvement and preventive medicine to both avert and, if need be, cope with crisis points such as the plague. Methodologically, it weaves in political economy and sociology into epidemiology. Its greatest success, however, lies in providing glimpses of how modern urban Gujarat functions – an aspect routinely absent in tracts on medical sociology.

**Harsh Sethi**

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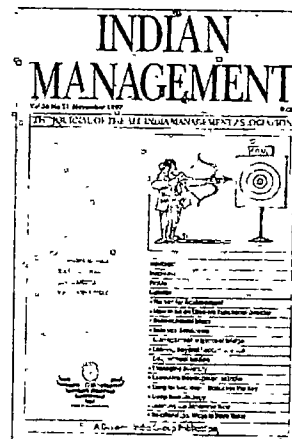
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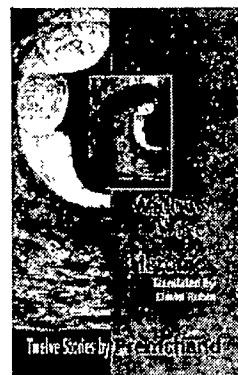
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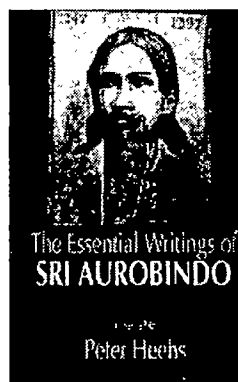
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# Backpage

IT has been some years now since 'peace' returned to the Punjab. Terrorism has been officially pronounced dead. With an elected government safely in place and the night life of the state back to its boisterous swing, it does appear that the terror-filled decade of the eighties has been properly interred. Memory, however, rarely behaves in accordance with the dictates of current politics. Few remember that the Sikhs of Punjab did not take kindly to the Akal Takhat being 'officially' rebuilt by Santa Singh after its destruction in 1984. The 'struggle' then was not only over who had the right to re-construct, but also about how the memory of the event was to be preserved.

The bloody decade had 'claimed' not just the Akal Takhat but many lives, innocent and otherwise. Between terrorist depredations and police 'encounters' thousands died, many vanished. The state's claim was that this was a 'fight to the finish'. In the process, rules and conventions were often flouted. 'Necessary', some might say. 'Terrorism cannot be fought with kid gloves.' And since the implications of a Punjab lost to the Khalistani's seemed unacceptable, the rulers of the day acquiesced, as did much of the media. Not so the 'victims' and their relatives. In today's somewhat more propitious times they are demanding justice.

Two probes, one by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) into the cremation of a large number of bodies described as 'unidentified' and the other by the 'unofficial' People's Commission set up by a number of human rights bodies, have reopened questions related to the 'handling' of the insurgency. The NHRC attempt to fix responsibility for the gruesome massacre and order compensation for the dependents of those clandestinely cremated by the police is being sought to be derailed by the state. This despite the Supreme Court taking strong exception to the attitude of the authorities. It may be noted that the police had cremated at least 1,238 bodies as unidentified, 585 as identified and 74 partially unidentified (*The Times of India*, 14 September 1998).

The agencies and personnel charged with crushing the insurgency clearly feel betrayed. They had risked life and limb, also of their families. To now be

put in the dock for saving the 'unity and integrity of the nation' appears an unkind cut. 'How could they be expected to fight well-armed militants with their hands tied behind their backs?' This is the common refrain of a force which feels 'used' by the political masters.

The reactions to the People's Commission, seen as 'extra-judicial', are far more severe. The law and order machinery, more so in strife-torn areas, looks upon human rights groups as meddlesome and naive or brands them as anti-national and pro-terrorist. And if probes are instituted well after the job has been done, the interventions are classified as a clear betrayal of the courage and sacrifice of the men on the battlefield. 'Where were these chaps when Punjab was burning?'

The situation in Punjab is made murkier by factional fights in the ruling Akali Dal. Often it is the hardliners in the Dal who aid these probes, as much to embarrass their moderate colleagues as to nurture their constituencies in the ranks of the erstwhile 'boys'. Much as this may sound cynical, but the victims and their families tend to become pawns in a battle of *realpolitik*.

The wounds of war heal but slowly. Half a century after the event, we have still to come to terms with the memories of Partition. The trauma of Punjab is still fresh. Further, there are the demands for justice, for fair play, for a rule of law. The state, even in extraordinary times, must respect the conventions of conflict. Otherwise we will lapse into barbarism.

Both the police and the 'innocent' victims of terrorist violence deserve full consideration, from the state and society. One way may be to institute a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the lines of the South African experiment. Those charged with executing the counter-insurgency operation must be forced to come clean. Similarly, those who extended support to militancy, including the various human rights groups who argue that the right to secede is an inalienable right of beleaguered nationalities, too must make clear their role. Only then can our society move towards more decent and humane norms of governing itself.

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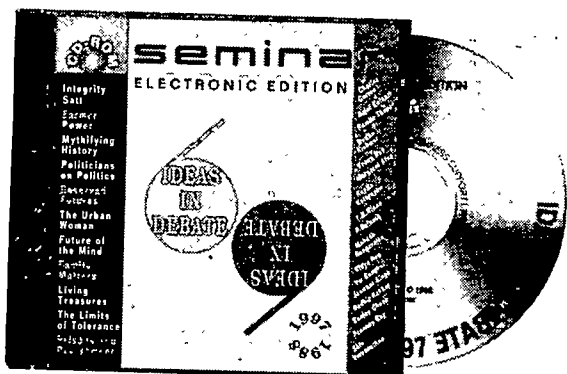
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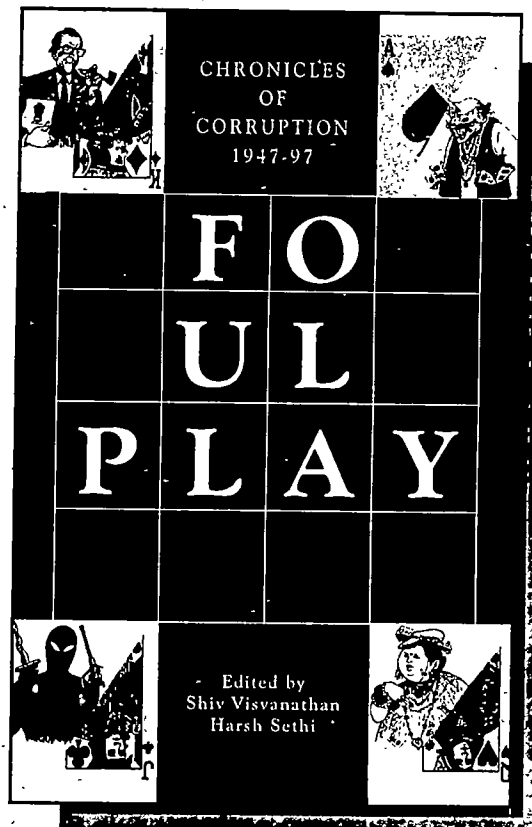
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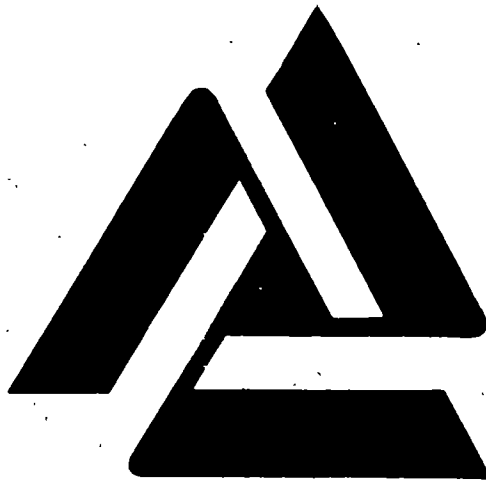
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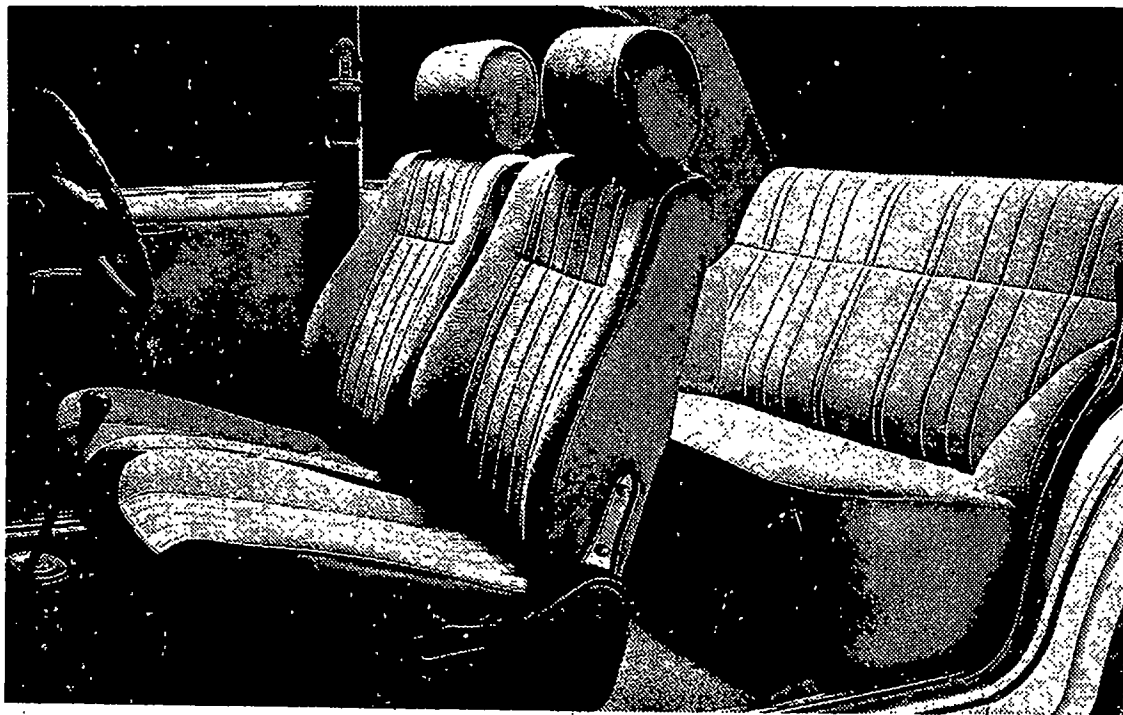
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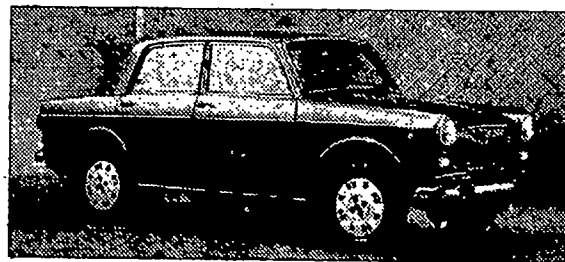
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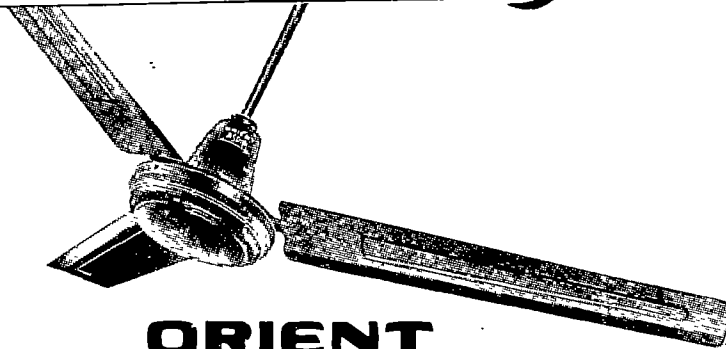
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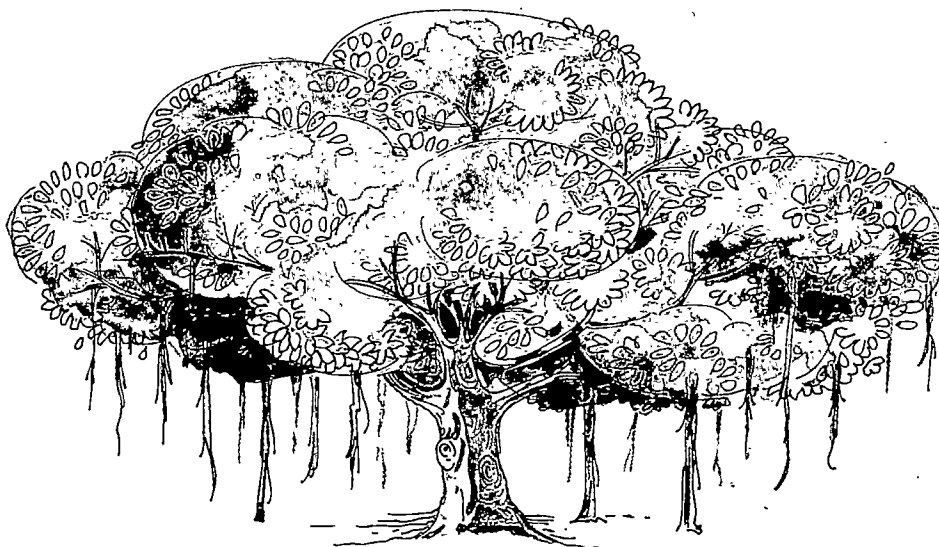
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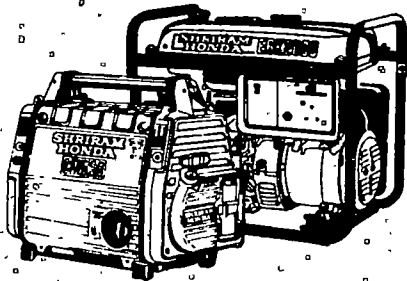
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Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- 47 **A DALIT FEMINIST STANDPOINT**  
Sharmila Rege, Women's Studies Centre, Department of  
Sociology, University of Pune
- 53 **ON A DALIT WOMAN'S TESTIMONIO**  
M.S.S. Pandian, Fellow, Madras Institute of Development  
Studies, Chennai
- 57 **A QUESTION OF QUOTAS**  
Dipankar Gupta, Professor, Centre for the Study of Social  
Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- 63 **COMMENT**  
Received from Ashok Singh, Executive Editor, TVI, Delhi
- 66 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by K.N. Panikkar, Sukumar Muralidharan,  
Arundhati Roy Choudhury, Pradeep Kumar,  
Harsh Sethi and Shastri Ramachandaran
- 81 **FURTHER READING**  
Compiled by Sunita Gulati, IIPA, Delhi
- 84 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
Designed by Designations

# The problem

FROM the pariah, an untouchable whose very shadow was considered polluting by orthodox caste Hindus, to the present-day dalit has been a long journey – troubled, contradictory, painful. For the different communities, juridically encapsulated within the bland and official category of scheduled castes, receiving recognition as an equal citizen of a democratic republic, far less the recovery of self-hood, is a project still waiting to be actualised.

The recent killings of dalits in Ramnathapuram, unfortunately an all too common and continuing occurrence, is symptomatic of the deeply held prejudice and hatred which marks our society. More distressing is the fact that none of the emancipatory projects – the Buddhist revolt, medieval bhakti movements, the creation of new religious cults, conversions to Christianity, Islam or Sikhism, the renaming of untouchables as harijans, or the secular efforts at affirmative action, political reservation, and the quest for political power through new political parties and formations – have so far made a significant dent in the existential situation of the dalit communities.

The reports of the National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are a grim reminder that the vast majority of the dalits remain poor, illiterate, lack the requisite skills for competing in the modern world, enjoy unequal access to productive resources, and remain deeply tied to land and traditional occupations which offer limited possibilities of upward mobility. Untouchability, though banned under the law, continues to be widely practised. And despite the emergence of a dalit middle class, and a steady (if small) encroaching in the arenas of education, jobs and professions, there is little evidence of a *roti beti vyavhar* across the caste rubicon.

Is it that caste consciousness, particularly the seemingly unbridgeable divide between the 'twice-born' and the 'ritually polluting' is much too deeply embedded in our collective psyche to permit anything but a complete rupture? Even conversion to religions which doctrinally disallow caste has not helped dalits evade stigmatization, not just *vis-à-vis* Hindus but even within their new religious communities. Is Fannonesque violence, a complete and violent overthrowing of the social order, then the only answer?

Much of what we witness as dalit politics is a reflection of this troubled relationship. Dalit assertions, be they for identity or for secular gain, often confront hostility. The Gandhian project, which involved renaming them as harijans alongside campaigns to eradicate untouchability, not only remained confined to the ideational level, it affected the liberal *sanatani* Hindu more than it did the dalit. Equally, the Ambedkarite legacy which focused essentially on the secular realm – resources, education, jobs and power – remained limited. While the former worked tirelessly to retain the dalits within the Hindu fold, the latter came to believe, late in life, that the solution lay in opting out, in conversion. Neither icon seem to appreciate that the victimised dalit was a victim of the victimised Hindu.

Extant dalit politics continues to dismay the liberal outsider – the fractious wrangling, the intemperate speech, the unprincipled alliances, the persistence of a narrow dalit elite which seems to have cornered all benefits, in the process distancing itself from its moorings and thus unrepresentative. This is partly a reflection of the contradictory self-activity of historically downtrodden groups and communities who find the rules of upward mobility and acceptance altered every time they seem to be making a dent.

Equally, notwithstanding the wealth of anthropological detail – the different dalit castes and communities, their secular and religious condition – analysts continue to treat them, at least conceptually, as an undifferentiated mass, as if they stand outside history. There is a tendency to reduce the complex repertoire of struggles – the assertion for identity (both individual and collective), for respect and social justice, for equality and power, for self-worth – to just the contingent primary objective. It is as if their struggle is merely for reservations, for jobs, or for ritual acceptance.

This is evident even in the sympathetic rendering of dalits in creative literature. Bhairappa's *Ullanghan*, Giriraj Kishore's *Parishista*, or Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* rarely approach the raw power of Daya Pawar's *Balut* or the early Namdev Dhasal poetry. It seems that the voice of the troubled outsider cannot meet that of the enraged victim, a point made brilliantly by the late D.R. Nagaraj in his collection of essays, *The Flaming Feet*.

What then of the future of dalit politics as exemplified by the Kanshi Ram-Mayawati BSP, the different RPIS in Maharashtra, the many dalit senas, or the dalit parties in the South? Seeking upward mobility through the reservation route (education, employment, political) is a strategy that is likely to yield poorer results. For one, in the era of liberalisation and privatisation, state generated avenues are shrinking. The introduction of OBC reservations via the Mandal Commission has also pushed the courts into defining more stringent rules for governing reservations, both at the point of entry and for further promotions. Most important, it has generated hostility in the upper caste bloc.

Similarly, exclusivist dalit politics based on consolidating narrow caste loyalties to extract advantages and concessions from the state is also meeting increased resistance, both from within and without. At one plane is the retaliatory violence of the *savarnas*. At the other is the increasing difficulty of consolidating the dalit, MBC and OBC blocs, with specific castes and segments seeking individual routes and alliances. Since the dalits on their own rarely represent a viable electoral strength, more than winning seats, they, or rather their parties, have been reduced to becoming spoilers. A series of 'opportunistic' alliances viz. of the BSP with the BJP and Congress, and the overblown egos of the dalit and OBC leaders, seem to have put a crimp in the construction of a larger and inclusive bahun politics.

Finally the cultural assertion route, be it through celebrating Balmiki or Rabidas *jayantis*, constructing temples to dalit dieties, or remembering the rule of Bali Raja. They too have their limitations, particularly in terms of political power. So is the adoption of the nomenclature of indigenous peoples as a source of generating pride in their past and cultural traditions.

The road ahead is bumpy. Nevertheless, despite recurrent betrayal by the leadership, the process of dalit conscientisation continues. A combination of the above strategies alongside increased realisation among caste Hindus of the need for reform and tolerance has contributed to a pluralisation of the situation. The anxious effort of the Hindutva brigade to incorporate Ambedkar as part of their iconography is indicative. The coming millennium will witness an intensification of this social churning. Hopefully it will lead to a more humane future.

This issue of *Seminar* explores the different facets of the dalit situation.

# The politics of naming

GOPAL GURU

CATEGORIES in political explanation enjoy a life-span of their own. They travel alone along a path strewn with challenges and counter challenges, contradictions and their transcendence. That is why these categories and their labelling (naming) change meaning, connotation and significance overtime and overspace, depending on the politics of the users who create these categories. In other words, in the domain of politics, these categories do not acquire an arbitrary character. They are not aimless or passive representations of the world out there, but are conscious constructions encoding either a positive or negative agenda.

The current debate about categories, particularly one like dalit, undoubtedly signifies the suppressed and the exploited groups in various

social formations. But it also hinges upon whether a given category represents a monolithic historical reality or whether it refers to the multiple, polycentric, polyphonic and dynamic relations of life.

In contemporary politics, most explanations indicate a hierarchical use of categories – the assumption being that the conceptual space may only be occupied by a single dominant category or one set of categories. Such essentializing or freezing of categories creates a sort of 'patent', making a particular category an individual's property. This process of monopolization or commodification tends to locate these categories within the realm of the intentionality of any group or person, or their enemies. This freezing of categories, thus, tends to artificially place people in a box as a given category.

Moreover, this attempt at freezing a framework suggests that the categorization of a particular collectivity does not depend upon the concrete historical material role played by any relevant entity while taking on the forces of domination and hegemony.

The dalit political discourse in our country is marked by a contestation of categories that engaged dalit leaders who tried to float different political categories, either for radicalizing dalit politics or for countering the radical politics of the dalits. The category dalit, which has become a part of academic discourse both abroad and in the country, has also found expression across the socio-cultural spectrum.<sup>1</sup> However, it has come to be keenly debated, politicized, even condemned by certain quarters of the dalit community.

**F**or example, the category dalit has faced criticism, particularly by the urban, educated middle class dalits, as socially regressive, derogatory and hence undesirable.<sup>2</sup> These middle class dalits argue that this category forces dalits to carry the load of their historical past<sup>3</sup> and hence offers a socially reactionary agenda.<sup>4</sup> There are others who argue that the category shares the same reactionary agenda as

the one invoked by Manu, the Hindu law giver.<sup>5</sup> These opponents argue that the *ontological basis* of the category of dalit is class, which is undesirable.<sup>6</sup> Instead, they prefer to define the category on an individualistic basis and foreground the category Buddhist.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, these attempts posit the category dalit in opposition to the category Buddhist.

**I**n recent years the term dalit has been discarded as a socially reactionary category by a section of the community who prefer bahun over both the Buddhist as well as dalit categories.<sup>8</sup> There are other efforts which do not run down the category as Buddhists and the bahujans do. Instead, they seek to define it primarily in terms of caste exploitation. For example, they define dalits as representing those who have been ground down by those above them in a deliberate manner.<sup>9</sup> This mode of understanding dalits also assumes that the category dalit implies an inherent denial of dignity, a sense of pollution within the framework of a theory of *karma*, justifying hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> All these attempts seek to define the dalit category negatively.

However, contrary to this denigration exercise by exponents favouring the use of bahun and Buddhist are consistent attempts by a few dalit

writers and ideologues who offer a radical definition. Baburao Bagul, who provided an ideological face to the Dalit Panther manifesto, promotes the use of dalit as a revolutionary category for its hermeneutic ability to recover the emancipatory potential of the historical past of dalit culture. He argues that this category has a greater capacity to reach out to a larger section of people. In Bagul's view this category is based on a materialist epistemology and is not a mere linguistic construction. On the contrary it is a category historically constructed through the revolutionary struggle of the dalits. And finally, as the Panther manifesto and Bagul spell out, this category is imbued with an ontological ability to identify itself with the lower castes, tribals, women and all the toiling masses in the country.<sup>11</sup>

**I**n the same vein, S.P. Punalekar offers another radical definition of dalit category. He claims that the term dalit is an intellectual construct aimed at decoding the subterranean, genuine and all-encompassing currents within society, meaning thereby the expression of the powerless and voiceless.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Punalekar provides a positive reading of the category dalit in a theory of politics which intends to foreground authentic thought and practice. Other scholars like Ghanshyam Shah, Gail Omvedt and Raosaheb Kasbe too define the dalit category more or less in a similar fashion.<sup>13</sup> However, scholars like Ashis Nandy treat the category dalit as a social construction of the

1. *Dalit Newsletter* is published from the USA by Dr. John Webstar, and besides the US it reaches parts of Europe. Moreover, the term dalit has become a part of universal academic discourse as one finds articles in various social science journals like *Social, Economic and Historical Review*, 1997. Even political leaders in India use this term frequently.

2. This is the general reaction that one comes across from the dalit middle class all over the country. They look at the term dalit with disdain.

3. The dalit middle class which is also criticised as the Dalit Brahmin expressed this reaction to the autobiography *Baluta* by the late Daya Pawar, one of the leading Dalit writers in the early 1980s in Maharashtra.

4. Bhausaheb Adsul (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar – Preneche Sahitya* (Marathi),

Maharashtra Buddha Sahitya Parishad, Mumbai, 1981, p. 6.

5. This comes up very frequently in the collection of R.D. Gaikwad who collated Ambedkar's memoirs in Marathi. It was published by Sugawa Publication, Pune, in 1996.

6. op.cit., Adsul.

7. Ibid.

8. The term bahun was floated by Kanshi Ram and also by Prakash Ambedkar and Makharam Pawar from Maharashtra.

9. It has been the recurrent theme of dalit literature in Maharashtra.

10. Baburao Bagul, *Dalit Sahitya Ajeche Kranti Vidhayan*, Buddhist Publishing House, Nagpur, 1981, p. 105.

11. Ibid.

12. S.P. Punalekar's comment on my paper in the seminar on Dalit Discourse held at Pune on 28-29 March 1998.

13. See Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements in India*, Sage, 1988; Gail Omvedt, *Dalit and Democratic Revolution*, Sage, 1994, and Raosaheb Kasbe, *Dalit Movement in Maharashtra*, Keshav Gore Memorial Trust, Mumbai.

middle class which defines it in purely ascriptive terms. Nandy further argues that this construction ignores the cultural moorings that correspond to other dimensions like traditional crafts and skills of the dalit.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the intellectual and political journey of the term dalit is complex. It is used in multiple ways, often in a contradictory fashion and therefore suggests a kind of conceptual hierarchy in its use. Other rival categories are so constructed that they provide little internal affinity with each other in terms of their political meaning and function, for example, the bahun and Buddhist categories.

**S**uch a privileging of any one category over others raises many issues. First, what is the historical trajectory of the dalit category? How is this category arrived at? Two, in the context of the ensuing debate, the category dalit involves a conceptual hierarchy which by definition implies that the conceptual space in the political explanation can be occupied by only one dominant category or a set of categories. In other words, does it involve any kind of homogenization of other categories? Or does it show a measure of tolerance and permit mutual coexistence with other categories belonging to the same logical class? Third, what is the future of these categories, particularly in the political domain? Will they be accepted by the different political forces in the country or are they destined to become untouchable?

In the historical journey, untouchables were characterized by the upper caste social reformers, particularly in Maharashtra, in a variety of ways. For example, S.M. Mate, a Brahmin social reformer in 19th century Maharashtra, used the term *asprutha* for dalits, meaning the

untouched rather than the untouchable.<sup>15</sup> V.R. Shinde, the Maratha social reformer, used depressed classes for dalits and thus located the term dalit in the imperial setting.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly, among the major efforts at naming dalits, Gandhi introduced the term harijan. Though different from the imperial setting, this was rejected by several sections of society.

It is interesting that the category dalit was first used by Ambedkar himself in his fortnightly *Bahishkruit Bharat*. He defined it comprehensively: 'Dalithood is a kind of life condition which characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalisation of dalits by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper caste brahminical order.'<sup>17</sup> Ambedkar, however, did not use this category often, preferring to deploy different terms depending upon the changing context. For example, when dealing with the imperial state he used the category of depressed classes.<sup>18</sup> When addressing high caste Hindus he used the category *bahishkruit* meaning totally outcaste.<sup>19</sup>

**I**n the arena of competitive politics, he preferred the term 'scheduled caste'. It was evident when he used this term for establishing the political party, Scheduled Caste Federation. However, he also tried to provide a class identity to the dalits during the late 1940s.<sup>20</sup> Finally, in an effort to

politically radicalize his own social constituency, he used the term *pad dalit*, meaning those who are crushed under the feet of the Hindu social order.<sup>21</sup> In more recent years the category dalit was first comprehensively deployed by the Panthers, thereby combining the caste, class and gender dimensions which were also part of Ambedkar's mode of thinking and his revolutionary politics.

**L**et us now examine these in relation to categories from the opposite setting. The category of harijan cannot be encapsulated within the dalit category since it is entirely 'metaphysical'. It imputes an element of 'resigned fate' to the subject and therefore can render it inactive. Second, the term harijan is an ascribed one since it does not flow from the untouchables own experiences. It was artificially imposed on the untouchables by Gandhi and those upper caste people who could not genuinely integrate them within their social consciousness despite its divine association. Overall, the category of harijan lacks a discursive capacity.

In contrast, the category dalit is not a metaphysical construction. It derives its epistemic and political strength from the material social experience of the community. It is this social construction of dalithood which makes it authentic and dynamic rather than passive and rigid. Hence, the term dalit, in Gail Omvedt's opinion, provides a militant alternative to the Gandhian term harijan.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the category harijan, given its divine association, is inadequate for capturing the

15. *Bharatatil Aspustahncha Prashna*. (Marathi). This book was written by S.M. Mate in 1930.

16. Vithal Ramji Shinde established the Depressed Class Mission in Bombay in 1906.

17. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Yanche Bahishkruit Bharat ani Muknayak* (Marathi), Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990, pp. 194-98.

18. See *Ambedkar's Writing and Speeches*, vol. 9, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.

19. Op. cit., *Ambedkar Bahishkruit Bharat*.

20. Ambedkar established the Scheduled Caste Federation Party in 1942.

21. Ratnakar Ganvir, *Bahishkruit Bharatatil Dr. Ambedkaranche Sfut Lekh* (Marathi), Ratnamitra Prakashan, Bhusawal, 1981, p. 56.

22. Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Vision*, Orient Longman, 1995, p. 77.



specific realities since it also replaces the need for internal critique.

The category dalit needs to be distinguished from the terms 'backward and forward'. It does not entertain such binary opposition because such binaries assume backwardness as a given in order to legitimize its distinction from forward. To state it more sharply, the category 'forward' logically feeds on the presence of the 'backward' and is sustained by it. Other binaries like privileged and underprivileged are unsuitable for the same normative considerations which are aimed at transcending all the constructs that underlie and renew the structures of inequality and exploitation.

**T**hese binary categories represent a minimal and at times negative agenda in the political sphere. They connote a negative utopia because they are primarily anchored within bourgeois structures embedded in the consciousness of possessive individualism which is basically self-limiting in terms of facilitating collective transformative political action. In other words, the category dalit, unlike harijan or the others, does not derive its substance from the politics of patronage or rhetorical concessions that liberal politics tend to offer to dalits and other toiling masses. Thus, the term dalit has a subversive potential which emanates from a realization of the limitations of the symbolic success which is the essence of bourgeois ideology.

The category dalit is also distanced from state constituted categories like scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and OBC. On the surface these categories, which are a legal construction by the state, appear innocent and at times secular. However, when understood in the context of their function they become a deliberate and therefore an artificial construction by

the state. These state constituted categories have a three-fold function.

First, they enable the state to trap the SCs into 'juridification' which in effect subordinates more and more SCs to the structures of spoil and patronage controlled by the state. Attempts to access these structures of paternalism reconstitute the SCs as the repository of a dole receiving mentality and charity rather than parity. Yet, at another level, these state constituted categories also acquire the status of a statistical entity which is then used by the state for *ad hoc* planning rather than for theoretical treatment of the social situation into which these categories are rooted.

Two, these categories, created by the state in the name of social planning, trap the SCs into a kind of 'domestic discourse' which in effect dilutes their creative energies by making them either official intellectuals who are ever ready to provide advice to the state, or power brokers with a vested interest in the perpetuation of the hierarchies in power structures. Thus the SCs, as constituted by the state, become the repository of malignant rather than benign power.

**F**inally, through creating such categories the state promotes the myth of sponsored individual mobility and initiative. This dampens the possibility of creating an autonomous political identity and a discursive space which might help the SCs constitute a collective context to find solutions to their own substantive problems outside the state framework or even to interrogate this very framework. The state constituted categories are patronizing and hence acquire an ascriptive status like the category of harijan or asprutha.

The category dalit emerged primarily in opposition to this 'domesticating discourse' in the early 1970s viz. the emergence of the Dalit Pan-

thers. The category dalit, therefore, seeks a political mutilation of these state constituted categories. Through its negative hermeneutic it resists any provisional achievement in the process of human emancipation. Possibly for this reason, Omvedt describes the state constituted categories as colourless.<sup>23</sup>

**T**he category of dalit also resists being drawn into a simplistic division between the majority and minority or the bahun and mahajan dichotomy floated by certain bahun leaders. It distances itself from these categories for two reasons. First, it does not perceive people as a statistical entity to be manipulated by the dalit-bahun power brokers or 'poll pundits'. This category does not exist *a priori*, either for computing or for electoral arithmetic, but has to be discursively constituted across the social and ideological spaces through constant and sincere negotiation with other vibrant and sensitive categories and their supportive ideological frameworks. For this reason the category is just not available for chicanery, political manipulation or calculation by any internal or external forces. Thus, the category of dalit has a potential to undermine the pragmatist politics (*realpolitik*) of the opportunist, both from the dalit community and outside it.

We now address the issue raised by Ashis Nandy who considers the category dalit as a social construction of the middle class. The category dalit is clearly not a middle class construction. If anything, its interrogation of the state constituted categories should answer Nandy's query. He claims that the category dalit is blind about its cultural context. He does not realise that the term dalit does not arise from a mechanical movement through the

23. Ibid.

highways of politics. Instead, it arises from the bylanes of critical cultural traditions such as the Buddhist, Warkari and Kabir.<sup>24</sup> But unlike Nandy, the term does not privilege the cultural over others; if anything it seeks to locate the cultural in the context of power structures that have a bearing on culture. It interrogates the structures of social and material hierarchies that sustain a particular cultural ethos. Thus, the category dalit is not one dimensional but is sensitive to its other anchorages.

Finally, we need to query the ontological relationship of the term dalit with categories like bahujan, Buddhist, class or subaltern. In other words, are all these categories mutually hostile to each other? The answer, much to the disappointment of the politicians from the lower and the upper castes is in the negative. These categories belong to the same logical class in as much as they share the same positive utopia of creating a society free from coercion, exploitation and thus, dehumanization of people. For example, how can the category Buddhist be in opposition to dalit or dalit in opposition to subaltern, class and bahujan when all encode the promise to engage the toiling masses into the radicalization of politics necessary for challenging the forces of hegemony.

The accommodation of these categories into an emancipatory project is not out of convenience; it has authenticity in as much as all these categories confront various structures of domination and exploitation. To conclude, the category dalit provides both an element of negation (to state constituted categories or harijan) and permits the conjunction of categories belonging to the same logical class (Buddhist, bahujan).

18 24. Gopal Guru. *Dalit Cultural Movement and the Dialectics of Dalit Politics in Maharashtra*. Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 1997.

# Dalit interpretations of society

RAMESH KAMBLE

INDIAN society has been exposed to various socio-economic changes and legal initiatives over the last 200 years. Factors such as colonialism, capitalism, and later Indian Independence, with the Constitution espousing democratic governance and legal provisions including the policy of positive discrimination, have all effected important changes in the social fabric and economic structure of Indian society.

Despite these changes, 'the Indian experience of social and economic status reflects the Brahminical hierarchies as much or more than the colonial or material hierarchies.'<sup>1</sup> Hence, the transition from 'caste' to 'class' continues to remain an unfinished and problematic agenda. This is more so in the case of dalits; though in a few cases the class status has changed, their social experience continues to be primarily dictated by their caste status. Nevertheless there have been changes. Apart from various state initiated efforts, the dalits themselves have revolted against the caste system and their lowly designation, and have struggled to reconstruct Indian society on the principles of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. However, these efforts have not rendered traditional social customs, beliefs, values and practices irrelevant.

A recent anthropological inquiry by Mayer into changes in the north Indian village shows that caste dis-

tinctions are very much observed in the village society. Though the significance of certain indicators of caste rank, such as acceptance of food from the other castes and formation of *pangat* (line of eating in village functions) have undergone some change, notions such as *khan-pan* (food and drink, meaning general domestic condition of caste) or *rahen-sahe*n (ways of life) have, under the changed conditions, become new markers of caste distinctions.<sup>2</sup>

If caste distinctions continue to be observed among the 'upper' and 'lower' castes, the situation in the social and economic conditions of dalits and the 'lowest touchable caste' ('on the verge of pollution line' as Deliege puts it), is not dissimilar. Deliege's study of a south Indian village exhibits that though the social and economic conditions of pallars (SCs) and valaiyars (lowest touchable caste) is identical, the economic position of pallars is in fact slightly better. The pallars' residential areas continue to be called *cheri* (untouchable ghetto), whereas that of valaiyars are called *ur* (village). The caste distinction between these two communities is reiterated through the vannans' (washermen) claim that they wash clothes of 'high castes only'.<sup>3</sup> If such has been the experience in village

1. Peter Robb (ed.), *Dalit Movements and Meaning of Labour in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, p. 67.

2. A. Mayer, 'Caste in an Indian Village: Change and Continuity, 1954-1992', in C.J. Fuller (ed.), *Caste Today*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 59.

3. Robert Deliege, 'At the Threshold of Untouchability: Pallars and Valaiyars in a

society, the condition in the cities too is no different. My study of dalit social experience in the urban setting of Mumbai shows that the social discrimination and economic exploitation they face has not changed. Rather, it has assumed different forms.<sup>4</sup>

**T**here are other inquiries which suggest that in contemporary times castes have not remained what they 'were', i.e., they are also constructed in a number of other ways—through formation of caste based associations for educational and economic advancement or marriage requirements. Consequently, castes will need to be seen as 'both something people "do" and/or something they "are".'<sup>5</sup> Thus, there is competition for social, economic and political spaces through caste networks. For dalits, however, who have largely remained outside the margins of development and continue to experience oppression, 'the experience of caste is not so much what you "do" as something which is "done to you" by the upper castes.'<sup>6</sup>

Given this background, of '(greater) continuity and (limited) change', an inquiry into the following interrelated questions would be pertinent. First, as a result of social awakening among them, how have dalits contested the upper castes' 'definitions' of their social status? In other words, how have dalits attempted to 'redefine' their social position vis-à-vis the upper castes' imposed defini-

tions of their condition? Second, if caste-based hierarchies persistently dictate their social and economic status, how do dalits view Indian society? Do these visions exhibit an overall commonality or diversity? Third, what has happened to the dalit goal of 'annihilation of castes' in India? Do they perceive the caste system as an irrevocable reality in India? Or do they think that despite the seemingly bleak possibilities for 'annihilating' the caste system, it is still necessary to pursue the struggle to end it?

**B**efore plunging into a discussion on these issues it would be appropriate to begin with the main approaches advanced to understand the dalit situation. In his study of an untouchable community in south India, Michael Moffatt argues that though treated as low in the Indian caste system, untouchables do not necessarily possess different social and cultural forms, nor do they possess a separate sub-culture. 'The "view from the bottom" is based on the same principles and evaluations as the "view from the middle" or the "view from the top". The cultural system of Indian untouchables does not distinctively question or revalue the dominant social order. Rather, it continuously recreates among untouchables a microcosm of the larger system.'<sup>7</sup>

Gerald Berreman, on the other hand, argues that low caste people 'laugh at upper caste claims of superiority.' They do not accept the unclean and demeaning status assigned to them. 'They have diverse notions of their own as to how and why the caste system developed, most of which refer to the superior power of the high caste rather than superior purity. They have

no option however but to defer to local high caste persons unless they wish to be beaten or deprived of their livelihood.'<sup>8</sup> Of course, despite the risk of being beaten or deprived of their livelihood, the dalits have, as many contemporary instances show, chosen to reject deference to the high castes.

The third approach which attempts to understand the untouchables' situation is exemplified by James Freeman's sensitive life history of the Bauris in Orissa. Freeman observes that the 'untouchables reveal a great diversity of responses to oppression.' The life history of the Bauris suggest a process of both 'an accommodation to or rebellion against' their oppression by the high castes.<sup>9</sup>

**T**hus, we have three main approaches which point to three different explanations of dalit orientations: (a) culturally, untouchables form a part of cultural order of the upper castes; (b) untouchables reject their inferior designation by the high castes and question upper caste notions of superiority, and if they accept high castes' superiority, it is not because of the intrinsic superiority but the superior power of the high castes; and (c) untouchables show both 'resentment against and compromise with' the high castes' domination. I would venture to suggest that dalit attempts at redefining their social status in contemporary times should be seen as a fluid combination of the above perspectives.

Though there appears to be a greater continuity and little change in the social and cultural framework of

Tamil Village', in C.J. Fuller (ed.), *Caste Today*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 86.

4. Ramesh Kamble, 'Untouchability in Urban Setting: Everyday Social Experience of Ex-Untouchables in Bombay', in Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *The Status of Dalits in India* (in press).

5. M. Searle-Chattarjee and Ursula Sharma (eds.), *Contextualizing Caste*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1994, p. 9.

6. Ibid.

7. Michael Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979, p. 3.

8. Ursula Sharma, 'Berreman Revisited', in Searle-Chattarjee and Ursula Sharma (eds.), *Contextualizing Caste*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1994, p. 74.

9. J. Freeman, *The Untouchable: Indian Life History*, George Allan and Unwin, London, 1979, p. 54.

Indian society, dalits have attempted to redefine themselves since the 1920s. The changed socio-economic structure under the British Raj provided the context for the dalits' ideological rejection of Brahminism and even Hinduism. Thus, as Gail Omvedt observes, by the 1920s there were many *adi* movements with an ideological claim to being of a 'non-Aryan' or original Indian; an equalitarian tradition began to take off in many regions of India.<sup>10</sup> In Andhra, the Adi-Andhra Mahajan Sabha claimed that the so called *panchammas* were the 'original sons of the soil and were rulers of the country.'<sup>11</sup>

In Uttar Pradesh, urban occupational experience for untouchable groups like the Mehtars, Bhangis, Chamars and Doms, created a context for the revival of the Bhakti movement and an ideological assertion of being adi-Hindus which became a source of denying caste distinctions and questioning discrimination. Through these means the untouchables argued that 'bhakti was the religion of the original inhabitants and rulers of India, the "adi" Hindus, from whom the untouchables have descended.'<sup>12</sup> That 'the Aryans conquered the original population by deceit and manipulations... those who ardently believed in equality were ranked, and ranked lowest.'<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Punjab too saw the formation of an adi-Dharam movement, proclaiming the untouchables as a separate community.

10. Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1995, p. 34.

11. Ibid.

12. Nandini Gooptu, 'Caste and Labour: Untouchable Social Movements in Urban Uttar Pradesh in the Early Twentieth Century', in Peter Robb (ed.), *Dalit Movements and Meanings of Labour in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, p. 284.

13. Gail Omvedt, op. cit., p. 38.

These ideologies of difference were, however, racial in nature, i.e., they viewed the difference between the touchables and the untouchables in racial terms, as Aryans and non-Aryans.<sup>14</sup> Ambedkar, however, rejected these ideologies by pointing out that there was no racial affinity between the Brahmins of Punjab and the Brahmins of Madras, that the Brahmin of Punjab was racially of the same stock as the Chamar of Punjab. Hence 'the caste system does not demarcate racial division.'<sup>15</sup> Thus, instead of referring to untouchables in *adi* terms, Ambedkar viewed them as 'broken men'. And instead of the racial approach, he stressed the civilizational conflict in India between Hinduism and Buddhism, the former representing inegalitarianism and oppression, and the latter an advanced egalitarian formation.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from these ideological/religious constructions in the initial phase, dalit struggles in later years came to be centred more on achieving social, economic and political rights as a source of emancipation. Further, in this pursuit dalits have also attempted to forge a larger unity of the marginalized sections in India. Thus, Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party was a step towards forging the larger unity of the oppressed, the working class and peasantry to fight Brahminism and capitalism. Later, through the all India struggle of the landless in 1957 and the Dalit Panther movement, dalit politics exhibited radical emancipatory leanings aimed at structural transformations. However, these did not materialize in concrete political terms. Thus, instead of a large united struggle of the

14. Ibid.

15. Quoted in Gail Omvedt, *ibid.*, p. 49.

16. Ibid.

oppressed masses, one witnessed a scattered and sporadic nature of dalit struggle in India.

Though the processes of socio-economic change in independent India have not altered the dalits' experiences of exploitation and oppression, it has nevertheless effectuated changes in some of their lives. Apart from creating the context for a sense of awakening, in questioning the caste system and even rejecting Hinduism among dalits, these changes have also created conditions for their co-option. Though the spread of education and government employment has made dalits more aware of their plight, it is through these processes of social mobility that some dalit communities have begun to visualize themselves, not as separate from the Hindu community, but as a part of it.

Bernard Cohn's study of Chamars in Sawai Madhopur is a case in point. Cohn pointed out that with education came a change in family structure, domestic ceremonies and religious life of Chamars in Madhopur which showed greater affinity to orthodox Hinduism. With the aim of raising their caste social status this community made a common effort to suppress their distinctive traditional religion. Their domestic ceremonies, such as at the time of naming and marriage, came to resemble Brahmin ceremonies.<sup>17</sup> Further, for the Jaiswara Chamars the changes also meant outlawing beef eating and the wearing of sacred thread, and a construction of themselves as 'Harijan Thakurs'.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, unlike this attempt of claiming a superior status within the Hindu framework, Lynch's study of

17. Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987, p. 272, 280.

18. Ibid., p. 279.

the Jatavs of Agra shows that the urban experience and consequent social mobility created the context for this group's rejection of not only the caste system but even Hinduism.<sup>19</sup> Thus, with processes of social mobility and change, dalit perceptions of self and society have assumed a more complex character. Perhaps the diversities and complexities of dalit perceptions of Indian society could be better grasped if viewed in the light of the specific experience from Maharashtra.

**M**aharashtra has been the site of the most radical dalit assertions. From the turn of the present century, dalits here have shown signs of awakening and protest. However, from the 1920s onwards, dalit struggles assumed a more decisive character. Under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar, the denial of basic rights to dalits became an *issue* in Indian politics. Of course, apart from campaigning against multi-pronged slavery of dalits, the movement also attempted to address the larger issues of exploitation and oppression suffered by the working class and peasantry. Such an orientation was present even in the post-Ambedkar phase of the dalit movement, notably in the nationwide *satyagraha* of the landless masses in 1957 and later during the Dalit Panther movement.

However, in addition to campaigning against socio-economic slavery, the dalits desired a life with human dignity and self respect. This, they were convinced, was not possible while remaining within the Hindu fold. Hence, on 14 October 1956, there was an exodus of dalits to Buddhism. Of course, even prior to this incident, some sections of the dalit community in

Maharashtra had converted to Christianity in the hope of achieving human dignity and personal well-being.

**T**hough the Ambedkar movement was largely supported by the Mahars, other major dalit groups in the state – Matangs and Chambhars – also joined it at some time or the other. The Chambhars participated in the dalit movement during the '20s and '30s. However, later, under the influence of the Gandhian politics of 'integration' they parted ways. The Matangs' participation in the dalit movement was more pronounced during the '70s and '80s, notably in the Dalit Panther movement and also in the *namantar andolan* (agitation for the renaming of Marathwada University). However, both these groups have largely stayed away from conversion to Buddhism.

The continuation of Chambhars within the Hindu fold in an attempt to get better treatment and the Matangs' indifference to conversion to Buddhism created rifts among the dalits in Maharashtra. The Mahars, who see their embracing of Buddhism as a rejection of Hinduism and a march towards a more egalitarian and humane culture, view these groups as lacking in consciousness. Hence, one notices different perceptions of Indian society among these groups.

In order to raise their caste status, the Chambhars have, through social mobility, made attempts to sanskritize their domestic and religious ceremonies. The better placed among them emulate the lifestyles of Brahmins, whereas the less educated show enthusiasm in observing Hindu festivals. This orientation has created grounds for their absorption into *Hindutva* politics and its agenda of building a *Hindu Rashtra*. Even Matangs, though following their traditional religious practices, i.e. the worship of deities such as Khandoba

and Ambadevi, and some among them laying claims to Dravidian culture, are not totally free from Hindu influences. Further, in order to gain political power they too think that the politics of *Hindutva* could be a vehicle. Indeed, the Chambhars and Matangs who joined *Hindutva* politics have been rewarded with seats in the legislature and some ministerial berths. However, this has not resulted in an end to socio-economic slavery for the majority, nor has it helped end caste discrimination. Rather, it has only resulted in their distancing from dalit struggles even further.

**T**he Mahars' conversion to Buddhism in 1956 made them reject the low status imposed on them and intensify their march towards dignity. Moreover, it made them staunch critics and opponents of Hindu culture and politics. However, the unfolding of the Buddhist identity during the last 40 years suggests that in their everyday life and cultural practices the Buddhists, as yet, do not show any radical departure from the traditional Indian (read Hindu) worldview. Indeed, their domestic and religious ceremonies indicate the observance of new, simplified and abbreviated rites (as opposed elaborate, lengthy, sanskritized Brahminic rites).

Moreover, Buddhism, at least for the less educated, remains ritualistically centred. In the case of the better placed among them it reveals both a formation of secular, 'this worldly' identity, and also an orientation towards achieving the purity of mind from evil forces. This latter view – stress on the mind – of Buddhism among some of the better-off, presents a dangerous orientation since it locates the source of problems *within*, as opposed to the caste discrimination and socio-economic oppression experienced from the *outside*. Instead of

fighting to end slavery experienced from the outside, the central preoccupation, thus, becomes a fight to guard the mind from evil influences.

**I**t is necessary to note here that this orientation is a departure from the conception of Buddhism espoused by Ambedkar in his work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism suggests that he viewed it primarily as a social ideology, aimed at ushering social emancipation in the lives of those condemned to slavery and robbed of basic humanity. In his conception, by embracing Buddhism, dalits would not only arrive at a new desirable identity, but would receive a right to independent critical thinking which they were denied under the Hindu caste system. Above all, Ambedkar's reading of Buddha's dhamma had its roots in Buddha's social message: justice, love, liberty, equality and fraternity.

Identity constructions and formation of worldviews are not devoid of the specific contexts of socio-economic conditions people are enmeshed into. Hence, dalit identity constructions and formation of their worldviews should also be seen in the light of their socio-economic experience. Because of their migration to an urban centre (Mumbai) and the consequent social awakening and struggle, dalits in Maharashtra have achieved social mobility, mainly in terms of education and employment in government services and the organized sector. Thus, during the '60s, '70s and '80s, dalits were absorbed into governmental employment and semi-government services. However, in present times they are being ousted from their positions. The policy of liberalization has rendered the policy of reservation redundant. Likewise, their access to employment in other organized sectors has shrunk drastically.

Thus, the dalits are experiencing new conditions of marginalization and subordination. The commonly experienced marginalization, however, has not become a ground for unity. Instead of questioning the state and other exploitative and oppressive forces of caste society, they perceive each other as a cause of their marginalization. The Matangs' claim 'that more than the upper castes, the Buddhists are our greater adversaries, as they have monopolized all sources of development'; that, 'we should be given a separate quota within the reservation quotas', are demands which make little sense if seen in the light of the policy of liberalization and privatization.

**W**hereas the Chambhars have exhibited greater allegiance to Hindutva and distanced themselves from dalit politics and movement, the Buddhists, though showing firm resistance to atrocities they experience (as the Ramabai Nagar incident indicates), express their resistance to Hindutva politics through the ballot box (as the last Lok Sabha and state assembly election results show). This resistance lacks awareness of an agenda for structural transformation. This variation in dalit orientation has implications for their goal of 'annihilation of castes' in India.

With experiences of marginalization and an inability to transform the structures which reiterate the enslaving experience, dalits do not exhibit a common perception but necessarily multiple, complex reactions. Instead of creating a context for dissolving caste differences from within, the commonly experienced marginalization of dalits has prepared the ground for an intensification of caste consciousness among them. Thus, if the Chambhars feel that the 'end of caste is possible only through

development of (our) caste', for the Matangs too 'developing our caste' has become a major concern. This aim, they feel, could be accomplished not through a rejection of Hindutva politics but by making use of it for political empowerment. Even among Buddhists (though they resolutely oppose Hindutva) the view that, 'if caste system presents an irrevocable reality in India'; 'if we have to remain the sole opponents of upper caste dominance; there is no other way but to think about "our" development,' has started gaining ground.

**D**oes this mean that dalits have given up their goal of annihilating caste? Perhaps it would be wrong to come to such a conclusion. For, with the ascendance of the ideology and politics of Hindutva, dalits are attempting to forge broader ideological and political alliances with other oppressed groups. Thus, an ideological construction such as *bahujanwad*, involving the unity of dalits, OBCs and other marginalized sections, is envisaged. However, to the extent that these strategies have succeeded, they have remained limited to political accomplishments alone. Even in these (as the SP-BSP experience show) there are more perils than promises. For, the political awakening among the OBCs and their quest for political power does not necessarily make them allies of dalits in working towards the 'annihilation of caste'.

Indeed, in recent times there have been attempts to radicalize the content of the category 'dalit'. It envisages a broader unity of all the oppressed – dalits, tribals, OBCs, the working class, peasantry and women – in ending subjugation, oppression and exploitation in Indian society. Of course, it is to be seen how far this radical ideological content is translated into common concrete action.

# Transforming dalit politics

A GAJENDRAN

The dalit movement has finally come to be recognised as having a potential to demystify the Indian nation-state. Its varied political configuration has, wittingly or unwittingly, catered to diverse social assumptions about the very nomenclature, composition, reach and above all its ideology, especially by the caste Hindus.

Most upper castes 'imagine' dalit (i.e., people derogatorily called SCs and harijans, both in British and independent India) as a category of exclusivism/sectarianism marked by a vindictiveness against caste Hindus. Surprisingly the dalits too share such an imagination as an easier option, particularly given the escalating caste Hindu intransigence. This essay attempts to understand, both at the theoretical and electoral political level, and situate the diverse imaginations and praxis of the binary of the 'self' (dalits) and the 'other' (caste Hindus) in perspective. The location of dalits and the caste Hindus as a binary cannot be adequately analysed without problematising their historicity and historiography as vital antecedents.

When one explores the historicity of dalits, their ethno-linguistic het-

erogeneity is manifested in all their socio-cultural features—festivals, religion, music, dance, food habits, medicine system and so on. However, a point to be noted is that traditionally many dalit communities seem to have accepted Buddhist values and incorporated them in their respective regional cultural features, thereby challenging the conventional understanding of a homogenised process which uprooted all dalit communities from their cultural milieu and accommodated them within a sub-continental boundary called Hindu India. This historicity is validated by the increasing archaeological evidence from Buddhist sites of different centuries which reflect dalit culture, as well as by the Buddhist dalit movements of the past centuries which have left behind the currently more privileged textual records.

The dalit cultural traditions and religious interpretations increasingly reveal their rational and non-dogmatic approach to material and religious life. Despite caste based persecution, they seem to have retained 'modernity' in their productive processes and worldviews. One sees this in their ingenuity in food production/agricul-



ture, craftsmanship/artisanship, medicinal practices, gastronomy, and above all literary excellence, especially when confronting the recent history of caste Hindu made calamities.

The above dalit historicity which views dalits not as 'objects' but as 'subjects' and its 'authenticity' could be brushed aside by a naive reader when one deploys the 'imposed historicity' of the 'other' to evaluate the 'self' i.e., 'dalit historicity'. This imposed historicity forces us to view dalits only within Hindu homogeneity and not beyond; it imagines dalits as a 'subordinated' category at the sub-continental level, especially after the arrival of the British and the freedom movement. The process of dalits negotiating with Buddhism, Islam and Christianity in different periods of history for their own liberal societal interests 'untouched' by Hinduism, as well as their attempts to ward off the latter's proselytization through the bhakti movement, becomes unhistorical in a framework conditioned by Hinduised historicity. Such a fundamental cultural divide between the dalits and the caste Hindus prevents the recovery of the 'self' *vis-à-vis* its emasculation by 'the other'.

**T**his 'negative' historicity of the dalits was reinforced as 'authentic' by the academia – Indian and European – from the British period onwards. Those who studied Sanskrit and hence Hindu scriptures, 'constructed' a paradigm which privileged the caste Hindus, enabling thereby the dehistoricisation of other communities, especially the dalits. The 'myths' of the Hindu scriptures, i.e. of the other, were taken as 'realistic' to undermine the 'myths' of the dalits, i.e. self, as 'unrealistic'.

The reinforcement of the roots of the caste Hindu centric *Akhand Bharat* can be traced to the legitimacy

accorded to it by European scholars. In this exercise the 'voice' of the dalit communities was 'mouthed' by caste Hindus, especially the Brahmins, as they were privileged as the 'most knowledgeable'. Empirical studies were carried out to reinforce the status quo, that is for 'privileging' a particular historiography.

The fallout of constructing such a dominant history led to a distortion of other disciplines as well, especially sociology, in a manner so as to 'subordinate or foreclose' certain cultures in order to 'foreground' a particular culture, viz. the use of conceptual paradigms such as great and little traditions, sanskritization, harijanization and so on. Evidently it was convenient for both the Europeans and the caste Hindus to stabilize their respective privileged positions through such exercises.

**F**or all these reasons, any source that valorizes India with its excellence in *gurukul* education and knowledges of different kinds, especially philosophy, as an uninterrupted sub continental homogeneity, remains suspect as a construction of 'the other' to the dispossession of 'the self'. This 'domestic colonization' of the academia stretched from the pre-colonial to post-colonial 'histories' of India.

The emergence of the subaltern school, especially in Indian academia, raised hopes about recovering the subordinated cultures of the sub continent. However, as Rosalind O'Hanlon has cautioned, many of the writings could not recover the dalits as 'subjects'; they were retained as 'objects' reflecting the 'pitying images' of the subaltern specialists within a homogeneous paradigm, rather than provide an appreciation of alternative heterogeneous cultural existence in the sub-continent.

The present day dalit politics cannot be understood in its entirety

if the aforesaid underpinnings are ignored. Historical sociology reveals the permanent dialectic between dalits and caste Hindus, of course, with the latter projecting an enduring success story of subjugating the former. But the unfolding myriad dalit ideologies and movements seem to point towards an essentially 'transformatory' philosophy which is 'liberatory' not merely of the 'self' but of the 'other' as well.

There are adequate reasons, currently, such as the caste Hindus celebrating the 50th year of their independence with the Jehanabad killings of dalits; the media, controlled by caste Hindus, ridiculing the demands and politics of the dalits through cartoons and headlines; the present political structure continuing to favour caste Hindus for political and administrative positions against dalits and so on, for dalits to react with as 'exclusivist' an ideology as their tormentors hold. However, the essence of dalit political moorings point to something different.

**T**he invention of categories such as bahun or dalit-bahun, usher in the plausibility of a progressive agenda of transforming Indian society as a whole (including dalits). So far the political processes in the sub continent, at least in the modern period, have sustained a political structure favouring the top rungs of the Hindu social order despite pretensions of adopting diverse ideological orientations. In such a setting the category bahun sought to upset the applecart of pro-caste Hindu politics. It actualised in electoral politics what Phule began in 19th century Maharashtra as a social reform movement and what Ambedkar contemplated in his political experiments of the 1940s.

While accepting the prevalence of a caste order it sought to subvert the benefits accruing perpetually to the

top rungs by uniting the lower rungs. It aimed to conscientise the non-caste Hindus, subsumed within the Hindu social structure degradingly as backwards, scheduled castes or adivasis, into a conglomeration of the 'sufferers', hence advocating the need to come together. The mere numerical strength of these victims, *per se*, was sought to be made use of to question the predominance of a minuscule minority like the Brahmins. Nevertheless, questions regarding the culture of the subordinated majority within the Hindu order were not problematised though the category was sensitive to the oppressions of other religious-cultural moorings by the caste structure. Hence it advocated unification with all victims of casteism;

**T**he category's prime focus was to point out the marginalisation of the majority by the minority caste Hindu groups. The present condition was sought to be changed through electoral politics which would empower the victims to restructure the socio-economic order favouring the *savarnas*, as the bahunas would reign. Despite its scathing indictment of the casteists, however, the bahunan category provided the space for the 'reformed' among the caste Hindus not merely to participate but also to represent the victims' cause of dismantling the caste structure.

The fact that post-colonial India experienced this unprecedented successful assertion by dalits, that too electorally through the bahunan category, affirms its intellectual understanding of transforming not merely itself but also the BCs, adivasis and other religious groups, as also the *savarnas* who realize their predicament. The accusation that it is sectarian appears to be merely an interpretation of those intellectual and electoral forces which are now being exposed

for their agenda of marginalisation, which feared even the mere arresting of caste-based age old socio-economic privileges as retribution, which supported a political category that would not disturb the present beneficiaries of the caste structure but would support a status quo.

**I**f the assurance of creating a space for dignity and prosperity to groups such as dalits can be betrayed by a mere installation of democratic institutions, even without Indian society undoing its undemocratic caste structure which determines the distributive mechanisms, that is in itself transformatory. If the dalits can ally with the backwards and other religious groups who have been victims of Hindutva under the umbrella of bahunan, we may witness a major transformation in India's political economy.

Even if the transformative capability of the category is limited to upsetting a few privileged castes, it is sufficient to prove its pathbreaking nature. For, the category creates avenues for those marginalised to share the political space, unseen so far by the diverse movements, including the much celebrated national movement.

The term dalit-bahunas represents yet another category with transformative significance. While it recognizes all the foundations of the bahunan category, it emphasises two important aspects: one, it supports the progressive logic that the most marginalised should be given the leadership of the movement. It highlights the role of the caste Hindu leadership, especially the Brahmins from the 'rightists' to the 'radical leftists', in perpetuating caste. Therefore, it foregrounds dalits among the bahunas of diverse marginalised castes and religious groups as those who have suffered most.

Second, as against the stranglehold of Hinduisation of the economy and hence politics, it counter-argues for 'dalitisation', i.e. incorporating gender parity, dignity of labour, horizontal division of labour, heterodox interpretation of socio-religious values, the understanding and practice of gastronomic practices such as beef eating and pork eating to undo the politics of vegetarianism, and so on. Instead of accepting an iron curtain it calls for caste Hindus to shed their inhuman existence and assume 'subject positions' within the humane values of the marginalised cultures. Therefore, any sectarian organisation of dalit-bahunas is antithetical to the very principles of this category. Rather, it provides a chance for the aggressors to redeem themselves.

**T**he philosophical worthiness of the aforesaid categories as 'inclusive' is yet to be realized in its totality by Indian society, especially in juxtaposition to the 'exclusive' unworthiness of the dominant paradigm and its politics. Such a realization is enormously hampered by the guilt and deprivation oriented paranoia of the privileged groups, now facing the agenda of transformation because of the revolutionary awakening among the masses against a casteist social structure.

This paranoia is perceptible, be it in a lay caste Hindu or an intellectual. It is further aggravated because dalits prescribe not merely an alternative transformative paradigm but also the assumption of leadership. To ward off such threats to the status quo, the caste Hindus seem to have dismissed 'all such efforts' by the marginalised as sectarian. Or patronisingly; considered them a disturbance by the fragments, the fringes which need to be assuaged by sharing 'assurances' of a slightly bigger slice.

Even though the invention of categories such as bahujans, dalit-bahujans and so on, have paradigmatic significance at the sub-continental level, nevertheless, the emergence of transformative categories, first, from outside the caste structure and second, through excavating the dehistoricised past, hence the present and future of the marginalised communities, seems more likely at the diverse regional levels. This implies that there is a need to recognize the diversity of marginalised groups such as dalits, as determined by their 'ethno-cultural niches'.

**T**he fact that India is yet to witness a homogeneous dalit movement, which would not merely assure electoral victory but also cultural renaissance of every dalit community, merits introspection. Those most prone to fantasize a monoculture of the subcontinent are the caste Hindus. Their political formulation received its severest beating with the collapse of the Congress party, notwithstanding its appeal to diverse cultures, especially dalits. The bubble of the BJP (doing what the Congress did in a camouflaged manner, i.e. its Hindutva project), is bound to be burst by none other than their victims—dalits—in the future, if not now.

Because the dalit categories appear most capable of raising questions about the caste edifice of Hinduism itself, they problematise the romantic agenda of delegitimizing the caste structure through secularism. Unfortunately, being oblivious to such realities makes the dalits pursue either an all-India politics with merely immediate electoral calculations since they are not backed by a positive homogeneous cultural discourse, or resort to 'constructing' a 'mono-dalit cultural discourse' subcontinentally. Either way, the possibility of dalits

succeeding in their long term political interests seems a far cry.

Had the undoing of the caste structure been possible merely through objective electoral politics, it would not have been as daunting as it is. Rather, we face a cultural manifestation influencing and gaining legitimacy, even through the electoral process. The caste Hindus engage in propagandising cultural symbols such as Ram, Ramayana or Mahabharata, which are then galvanized in electoral politics through *rath yatras*, through claims that these symbols are descendants of a history and subcontinental culture to manipulate the electorate. The electoral victory, in turn, is used to perpetuate such a 'memory' through politics, especially education. Of course, such a Hinduisation of the subcontinent is challenged as a recent fantasy. Hence the electoral reversal of the BJP, which is and will continue to be seen, as an organization of caste Hindu forces.

**I**f influencing electoral politics through cultural variables is a truism then the chances of dalit groups assuming a sub-continental, homogeneous, positive alternative cultural discourse is doubtful. Further, a mono-dalit cultural discourse may well uproot the natural regionalised cultural strengths of the dalits as possessing oral and written traditions and knowledges of their own, i.e., music, food, medicine, agriculture, hunting, fishing and so on. A major consequence of such an uprooting is that they will lose their 'positive history'. Reliance will have to be placed on sources such as Hindu scriptures and narratives whose agenda is to bequeath a 'negative history' for dehistoricising groups such as dalits, and valorise the subcontinental politics of the dominant castes as true history.

On the contrary, a dalit politics which situates itself in its respective

ethno-linguistic context and articulates a cultural significance which would encompass everyone—from the decasteised to the caste Hindus—has enormous significance. A community's knowledge systems and cultural values are rooted in its linguistic evolution. Dalit groups, despite the casteist onslaught, have survived, that too more humanely. It means that they have always possessed alternative knowledge systems *vis-à-vis* the discriminating Brahminical values. And these can only be deciphered from their linguistic structures (oral and written) and not from the Brahminical scriptures.

**S**ince the linguistic formations in the subcontinent have incorporated the dalits with other low caste people as one culture, it is important to unearth the contributions of the literateurs, medicine persons, musicians, agriculturists and craftspeople from the so-called lower castes (dalits) in shaping an alternative culture, both preceding and influencing the Dravidian movement in diverse ethnic contexts. Such an exercise would help dalits restore their self determination.

Such an endeavour for the restoration of their positive history has so far not been forcefully articulated by the dalits, primarily because they have shied away from shedding whatever was defined as nationality, nationalism and national development. Preventing this damage is central to the restoration of their non-Hindu cultural values. Such an articulation would automatically undo the stronghold of the caste Hindu subcontinental politics because of the demystification of the latter's fantacized historicity, from which they derive strength for their electoral politics. As for the dalits it would be a liberatory rediscovery of their cultures.

# The roots of dalit consciousness

ELEANOR ZELLIOT

THIS essay attempts to briefly look at the factors which set off a dalit movement, defined simply as a group of dalits who attempt over a period of time to establish an egalitarian place for themselves in modern society. More specifically, the essay deals at greater length with those factors that sustain the movement, the roots of consciousness, which allow pride, self-respect and a vision of the future. The word dalit in this context includes all those from ex-untouchable communities—Hindu, Christian and Buddhist—who define themselves first as dalit (oppressed) rather than as harijan, untouchable, or by their caste name. It is a name chosen by the groups themselves and indicates a political and social awareness.

The source of a dalit movement can be economic, either new opportunities or the denial of one important to the group. (For instance, in the case of the Maharashtrian movement, it was new opportunities in Bombay, Nagpur and smaller towns that were not attached to the 'inferior village ser-

vant' role, and also the loss of military recruitment as the British evolved their 'martial race' theory for their armies.) It can be legitimization by high caste Hindu reformers, although that is not by any means a certain stimulus. It can be the product of leaders within the group who by a chance of education or exposure to new ideas set out on a new path.

In the contemporary period it may be a critical mass of educated dalits. Or it might be a significant insult that triggers a unified response. Whatever the cause, and this is the key, it results in *an idea of self-worth* which is *not* recognized in the society around the group. And at this point, a movement is formed and subsequently uses the historic or the mythic past to produce the images which sustain the movement. Individuals in all castes have asserted their human rights and sought change; this essay deals with dalits in groups.

In the Indian situation, while there are a number of movements

among specific untouchable or dalit castes, one also comes across other castes who, although they may feel oppression, have evolved no path of protest or change. These groups too have their source of pride, which may be equally mythic or historic.

**A**s an example, is the story of an untouchable caste in a Bengali village which is desperately poor and in need of economic improvement. They are a proud group, but their pride is founded in their religious duty of carrying the Goddess Durga's palanquin, and that they continue to do. This is recognized as essential for the village, and that is enough for the untouchables involved! They feel important, connected to the world around them, and there is no impetus for change.<sup>1</sup>

The movements I have in mind as I try to theorize about change are the older movements of the Adi-Dharm of Punjab and U.P., the Satnami of Chhatisgarh, the Narayana Guru movement in Kerala (although the Ezhavas were no longer considered untouchable by 1930) and in the contemporary period the dalit movement in Karnataka, the rise of a dalit Christian movement in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the phenomenon of Kanshi Ram, Mayawati and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, the new political thrust in Tamil Nadu and, of course, the dalits of Maharashtra with their ever more creative forays into the modern world of education and culture.

I am not clear about the factors that produced each of these movements, except for the Maharashtra movement,<sup>2</sup> nor the historic or mythic elements of their beliefs about themselves. What I can do is to note those

1. This story was told me by Krishna Soman who is now working on women's concerns at the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.

2. See my *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays*

instances in which a mythic past does *not* produce a movement for change, analyze factors accepted and rejected in the building of the Ambedkar movement in Maharashtra, speculate on elements of the past that serve in some areas as catalysts and not in others, and end with a view of the present place of the larger than life B.R. Ambedkar as the new element in movements all over India. A recent seminar in New Delhi at the Jawaharlal Nehru University on Ambedkar in Retrospect brought together dozens of scholars, and some of them, those from south India in particular, encouraged me to stress the cultural aspect of the post-Ambedkar dalit movements.

**F**irst, there are a number of interesting uses of the past among untouchable groups which do result in pride and often a sense of identity but not in any change. The prime example, perhaps, is that of the Bhangis who find meaning in their chosen name of Balmiki, referring to the author of the epic, *The Ramayana*. There seems to be no perceptible effort among Balmikis to change their role in society as sweepers and removers of human waste, although individual Balmikis have certainly changed their status in society. Ravidas, the 16th century Chamar saint-poet who is famous throughout the north and in Maharashtra, is both used as a name for certain groups of Chamars (leather workers) and as their claim to historic worth. Ravidas temples dot the north, and a grand temple is being built at the end of the line (down river) of temples on the *ghats* of Varanasi, a temple begun by Jagjivan Ram when he was at the centre of Congress power. But the Chamars are seeking a new power through political means in the name of

*on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2nd edition 1998, first published 1992.

the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, not through Ravidas.

**A**n incident in Maharashtra underlines the limits of Ravidas as a catalyst. The saint, known there as Rohidas, is famous among the Chambhars of Maharashtra as *their* saint, even though they are Marathi and not Hindi speakers. In the grand pilgrimage to Pandharpur, the best known of Maharashtra's religious events, Chambhars became part of the *palki* (procession of palanquins) leading Alandi, the most honored of all palkis. Until some 20 years ago, Chambhars marched in their *dindi* (a smaller group of devotees within the palki) in front of the white horse which symbolizes the eternal presence of Dnyaneshwar, founder of the Pandharpur bhakti movement.

Since all other dindis marched behind the horse, with the Brahmin dindi at the very end of the long procession, they instituted a movement, including a legal case, to move their dindi behind the horse. And now the Rohidas dindi right moves behind the horse, followed by all the others, with the Brahmins at the end of the palki. As the most important palki, its place is at the very end of the long line of palkis which march from the gathering point outside Pandharpur into the city.<sup>3</sup>

Rohidas does encourage some movements; his *dharmashala* in the town of Pandharpur is also a centre of teaching and is a lively place filled with students. In the north, Rohidas temples are statements of pride and gathering places. But a modern movement of the masses in his name seems

3. An article by Irawati Karve, 'On the Road', best reproduces the spirit of the Pandharpur pilgrimage, including its adherence to caste. It has been most recently reprinted in *The Experience of Hinduism*, edited by Eleanor Zelliot and Maxine Berntsen, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988.

unlikely. In the meantime, Chambhars in Maharashtra have chosen to be called by the more Sanskritic name of Chamakar, while Chamars in the north often prefer the name of their saint, Ravidas.

**A**nother example from the bhakti movement, India's most egalitarian religious period, is the significance of the Tamil untouchable saint Nandanar to untouchables in the Kolar Gold Fields. They see Nandanar, who finally entered the temple after much effort and was engulfed in the image of Shiva, as part of the Shiva Nataraj iconography. Many images of the dancing Shiva show flame-like waves flowing from his waist or hips, and for this group of devotees, those waves are their beloved Nandanar, part of God himself.<sup>4</sup>

According to Partha Mukta, Mirabai serves as a woman who suffered as does an untouchable group in Gujarat and she is revered as symbolising hope and comfort in their lives. Devotion to Ram in an intense way serves as an identity for an untouchable group in the Hindi belt, according to Ramdas Lamb. Ghashidas, founder of the Satnamis of Chhatisgarh, is sometimes seen as an incarnation of Buddha, Shankaracharya and Ravidas, according to Saurabh Dube. These associations with saints and gods can be very powerful. Until the coming of Ambedkar on the scene in Maharashtra, Mahars found their saint of the 14th century, Cokhamela, a very meaningful reference point for their piety and worth. Although Cokhamela protested against the very idea of purity and pollution, he also blamed his birth in an untouchable caste on sin in a previous birth. This justification for untouchability was not acceptable to Ambedkar, or any modern reformer.

As I look for the symbols that create that all important quality of self-respect, I find that most untouchable castes do have some source of pride. The culture of those on the bottom is not yet a subject of current serious scholarship. But, especially in the South, there seems to be a new trend of looking at the folk culture of various groups. *Pariah* after all means 'drum', and a pariah has brought the traditional drumming of his caste into the Tamil movie industry. The Tamil Theological Seminary in Madurai has videotaped the traditional culture in the untouchable quarters of a village, and Henry Tyagaraj of the Dalit Liberation Education Trust takes a group of American students from the Semester at Sea programme to a Tamil village for an evening of dalit folk culture every year. This interest in folk culture is a link between the masses and the elite, and may become one of the sources for pride in a more sophisticated way than it now is.

**K**ancha Ilaiah has written at length about the gods and goddesses of those who are, according to his research, not Hindus. The dalitbahujan peoples have a separate culture and philosophy as well as a political economy which involves working with their hands.<sup>5</sup> Ilaiah feels that 'the dalit wadas and the cultural life that dalits live has a powerful potential to become universal... dalit music, songs and... dance... can produce many Gaddars, many Illayarajas, it can produce many intellectuals whose knowledge is much more explosive.'<sup>6</sup>

The bhakti movement, the service of untouchables in the British army, folk myths, and 19th century

thought, both British and Indian, created many symbols that could be pressed into the service of a dalit movement in Maharashtra. I have noted that the 14th century Mahar saint, Cokhamela, was in the late 19th and early 20th century a symbol of religious worth. Some Mahars called themselves Cokhamela (as Chamars in the North call themselves Ravidasis). Hostels and schools were started in his name. Poems challenged Mahars to be as brave as he was and to enter the temple.

**B**ut with Ambedkar's perception of Cokhamela's limitations, especially the saints' acceptance of *karma*, and the fact that no untouchable could enter the temple at Pandharpur but had to stop at the *samadhi* of Cokhamela at the foot of the great door, the usefulness of this symbol as a dynamic catalyst ceased. His importance now is to scholars from the community! A number of them are working on Cokhamela for Ph.D. degrees; there is interest in his wife, sister, son and brother-in-law as an unusual family of bhaktas; there is belief in some quarters that Pandharpur was actually originally a Buddhist site.

A belief that was important in the 19th century, and surfaces today both in Maharashtra and in other states, is the idea that untouchables were 'lords of the land', the original dwellers and rulers of the country, displaced by the Aryan invaders. Again, this is an idea which was not part of the belief structures that Ambedkar built. It might have been his knowledge of the race situation in America,

the 'Ambedkar in Retrospect' conference held at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 27-29 August 1998, p. 17. Gaddar is a folk singer of great popularity in Andhra Pradesh. Illayaraja is a music director in Tamil films who has introduced the folk drumming of pariahs as an important art and with great effectiveness.

4. Story related by Vasudha Narayanan.

5. See *Why I am not a Hindu: A Suddra Critique of Hinduva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, Samya, Calcutta, 1996.

6. Ambedkarism and the Indian Counter Culture. Paper presented by Kancha Ilaiah at

gained because Columbia University, where he spent three years, is on the edge of the huge black area called Harlem. It might also have been his firm belief that all peoples are ethnically divided, and that Indian peoples are not in any special way divided between Aryan and non-Aryan.

**S**ince India also has tribal peoples, indigenous groups called *adivasi* (first dwellers), some of whom do have a different language from either the North or South languages, it makes it difficult to think of peoples as integrated into economic life as are untouchables as a separate race. Ambedkar's theory was that Aryans mixed with local peoples from their early incursions into India, and that untouchables were at one time Buddhists, forced to live outside the village in penury when Brahmanical religion became strong, probably around the 4th century A.D.

There are stories of heroic sacrifices by Mahars such as that of Amrutnak, who mutilated himself when he went to search for the Queen, lest it be thought he had seduced her, or she him, on the way back from her captors to the palace. Stories of sacrifice appear in the various Gazetteers and are common to untouchable groups everywhere, but do not figure much in modern identity building. A hero such as Lahuji Mang, a wrestler and physical trainer associated with Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, a 19th century radical reformer in Maharashtra, is emerging as a hero to the Mangs, whose movement for a place in the sun is just beginning.<sup>7</sup>

A symbol used early in the 20th century by pre-Ambedkar reformers came from British history. The English parliament had been opened to the common people almost a hundred

7. The Mangs also claim a modern author, Annabhau Sathe, whose fiction contains

years before, argued Shivran Janba Kamble, a butler in the Masonic Hall in Pune and an early educator and spokesman. So why couldn't the British in India open the democratizing process to India's low classes? Ambedkar continued this idea of finding parallels in other countries, or universal principles from a collection of varied cultures. The Dalit Panthers, a militant group of young poets in Bombay in the early 1970s, clearly took inspiration from America's Black Panthers. My feeling is that the life of comparable groups in Europe or America may have considerable value as a stimulus even below the elite level.

**T**he most meaningful symbol for the Mahars of Maharashtra was that of military service. There actually were guards for the forts of the 17th century King Shivaji from untouchable castes, but it was service in the British army which became mythic, and it was denial of that opportunity in the latter part of the 19th century which triggered the first attempt by a Mahar to appeal to the British government. The petition of Gopal Baba Walangkar was carefully drafted but never sent, evidently through lack of courage among the retired armymen he contacted.

The idea of militant bravery became ever more important, however, and in the 1920s Ambedkar took a group of his followers to a pillar in the village of Koregaon outside Pune which commemorated the victory of the British over the Peshwa of the Maratha empire in 1818. The name of every soldier who fell in the battle, British and Indian, is engraved on the Koregaon pillar.<sup>8</sup>

stories of early Mang nationalist heroes, and it is Annabhau's statue which occupies a proud place in Pune as a symbol of the Mangs' creativity.

The Koregaon pillar became a symbol of Mahar militancy and bravery. When a Mahar regiment was added to the British Army roster in 1942, the caps bore an image of the Koregaon pillar (changed when India became independent). When the Dalit Panthers were born, the Pune branch members would bicycle out to the Koregaon pillar for inspiration.

**N**ow, on 1 January, there is an all-day celebration of the Ambedkar movement, which includes speeches by politicians, marches by various local Samata Sena (equality army) groups, Buddhist *vandana* (Pali chanting), displays of Buddhist and Ambedkar literature and cassettes, and a fair for the children. It is a massive affair with groups coming by truck, rickshaw, bicycle, on foot (some carrying torches), bus—any way, in the thousands. The importance of Koregaon must be seen in the past of the untouchables. Subservient, uneducated, considered inferior in every way, untouchable castes must build a new courage before they can challenge the hierarchical system.

Although military service has been of immense importance in Maharashtra, the fact that untouchables in Madras were important components of the sappers and miners in that army seems not to have been used to build a new image. In Maharashtra, a Chambhar cricketer, P. Balu, was one of the best players in India and probably also in England, in the first quarter of this century. Though a valued player he was not allowed to become captain. Ambedkar felicitated his victories, and he remained a

8. Is the Koregaon pillar unique? Or can the names of those especially commemorated by the British be found in other battle sites in India? There are names of Jews and Muslims as well as Mahars (and others) on the Koregaon pillar.

member of the Ambedkar movement until the conversion announcement in 1935. (At this time, most Chambhars left, protesting against the rejection of Hinduism.) Given the importance of blacks in sports in the U.S. to a sense of achievement and worth, it is strange that P. Balu has not been accorded a hero's role in Maharashtra.

**M**ahars and Mangs were known for their musical abilities. A proverb often quoted is: In the Brahmin home, books; in the Maratha home, grain; in the Mahar home, song. But although there is always music, usually by semi-professional groups, at the occasions of Buddha Jayanti, Ambedkar Jayanti and other gatherings, little is made of past talent. The *jalsa*, a musical and theatrical presentation of ideas, was a feature of the early Ambedkar movement but like the folk drama called *tamasha*, which was largely in Mahar hands; it no longer is of ideological importance. Nor is the unique religious role of the Mahar as the *potraj* servant of Mariyai, goddess of pestilence. Her temple is always located in the *maharwada* in Maharashtra, but by and large it is Mangs who now perform her service. Mangs also continue to play at weddings in semi-westernized bands. I think that when these entertainment abilities are seen as service at the behest of upper castes, they lose their ability to promote dalit consciousness.

In Maharashtra, ever since he began his newspapers and conferences in the 1920s and in most other parts of India since his death, Ambedkar has been the all-important symbol in the creation of dalit consciousness. The examples are legion. His statue is placed on land reclaimed for dalits from caste Hindu usurpation in Tamil Nadu. Town councils put up bronze images to acknowledge the

importance of their dalit populations. Slum dwellers and villagers alike make plaster images, complete with spectacles, to state their loyalties. Universities and research institutes from Delhi to Madurai are named after him. A dalit woman doctor from Andhra spent seven years of her life, leaving her clinic and her son in the care of her supportive husband, and made the finest film on the life of Ambedkar so far produced. The books and the poems on Ambedkar, both from without and within the movement, proliferate. And when dalits go too far in challenging the status quo, the image of Ambedkar is attacked.

**T**he meaning of this symbol of the statue or the photo grows from the life and work of B.R. Ambedkar. The image is always clad in a western suit, white shirt, red tie, pen in pocket, book in hand. The image usually represents Ambedkar with an upraised arm, teaching or declaring the message of courage and equality. It stands erect, unmoving. This is what the image represents: education, success, contribution to the political world of India, courage, empowerment through reservations, protection through a relationship to government, 'one of us' who was not only important personally but was important to India. The book the image of Ambedkar carries is the Constitution, and his role as chairman of the drafting committee has assumed great importance and symbolic value. He is without specific caste. He is dalit of dalits. He has no identity as a Maharashtrian. He is all India.

This overpowering image of Ambedkar does not obliterate other 'roots of dalit consciousness.' Rather it encourages dalits to look for the abilities, the talents, the triumphs, both of the historic past and at the folklore of the village as well.



# Caste and economic reforms

K. S. CHALAM

IN the Indian sub-continent, caste is considered a special social category. It is rarely analysed by social scientists as an economic category, notwithstanding the fact that though its manifestation is social, its essence is purely economic. In fact, the social anthropologist, H.W. Wiser, who examined caste and introduced the concept of *jajmani* for the first time in the 1930s, analysed the transactions between different castes in a village in purely economic terms.

The real transactions between brahmins and kshatriyas, between the *dvijas* and other servile castes, and among the servile and untouchable castes were found to be purely economic in nature. Wiser estimated the value of products and services transacted between castes in Kalimpur village and established that the brahmin provided only intangible services and took the highest value of goods and services from others. At the lowest level, the untouchable provided the maximum value in terms of goods and services and in return received the lowest value. If these values are trans-

lated as returns on each caste's stock of property, the concept of caste as an economic category becomes clear.

Marx has argued that social relations are always embedded in economic relations which are nothing but property relations. In this context, caste is coterminous with property in India. However, considering the Hindu caste as property has certain limitations. The character of property as a thing to exchange with others or sell to outsiders is extremely limited. Caste should be considered a communal possession and not as private property. Wiser posits that caste was a corruption of the ancient custom of communal ownership under the control of the *panchayat*. In other words, caste is a Hindu category of property with the brahmin possessing the highest value and the untouchable assigned the lowest.

Viewed from this angle, the caste system as described by Ketakar and adopted by Ambedkar does not represent a division of labour. It is a division of groups of people with each assigned a particular economic value.

The castes, being economic entities, accumulated these values over a period of time. But, the Hindu superstructure which protected this economic caste base did not allow the non-dvija castes to accumulate and capitalise their value. The dvija castes of brahmin, kshatriya and vaisya were given the right to education, assets, weapons and so on, which naturally accumulated (maybe primitive accumulation) capital over a period of time and improved the value of their human capital. This was denied to the *sudras* and untouchables. As a result, the social manifestation of unequal exchange between castes has in fact an economic base, as caste is synthesised as property in India.

**C**aste, being a property of a group of people, could be utilised to the advantage of the members of the group. It has been used to exploit others as also to empower one's own group. These concepts have been used here to understand the economic power of the dominant dvija castes, particularly the brahmin caste in India today.

In modern democratic societies, the struggle between different political groups is ultimately over the distribution of resources. Those who succeed end up controlling resources which enables them to provide patronage. In India, the brahmins have played the role of arbiters and thereby enjoyed the patronage of whoever wins out. Kautilya, a brahmin intellectual, laid the foundation for a brahminical political economy much before the emergence of western economic theory.

Kautilya's political economy was based on a principle that every person is dishonest as against the western notion that human beings are rational. The *Arthashastra* details how the state should generate revenue and how it should be spent. In the state

hierarchy, ministers enjoyed the highest status followed by the *purohit* (priest). Generally both were from the brahmin community. Kautilya observed that the king could cheat people in generating revenue for the exchequer. These Kautilyan principles were followed by most kings till the emergence of an urban economy.

The emergence of a manufacturing sector and an urban economy can be traced to the Muslim rule in the middle ages. But the Muslim rulers too employed brahmins to interpret the *dharmasastras* and consequently brahmin hegemony continued even during the Muslim rule. Brahmin scholars mastered Persian, the court language. Many of the *munsabdars* were brahmins. Unlike the ancient *purohitis*, the ministers both under Hindu and Muslim rule, grabbed land either in the name of *inams* (land grants) or through subterfuge, in the process becoming owners of vast tracts. By the time the British came to this country they had become powerful landowners.

**D**uring the British regime, the brahmins joined forces with them as *babus* and exploited the toiling masses. The emergence of a modern bureaucracy was a boon for the literate brahmins who joined in large numbers, ultimately bringing it under their control. The bureaucracy under the British regime established control over resources, particularly revenue and land distribution.

The surplus from the agricultural sector, generated due to the introduction of modern methods, helped develop the artisan guilds. Further, the development of international trade through the East India Company and other agencies gave rise to a manufacturing sector in the country which was by and large under the control of non-brahmin groups. The brahmins slowly

shifted into secular occupations that accompanied industrialisation. They envisaged that the economy could be eventually managed and manipulated by them even though the British were a hindrance to their plan. Mahatma Phule in his book *Gulamgiri* describes how the brahmins exploited the masses and even cheated the British.

**A**fter the British left in 1947, India saw the beginnings of a direct brahmin rule. Though there was abundant, educated and skilled manpower to manage the affairs of the economy, an overwhelming majority of those at the helm of affairs came from brahmin families. Babasaheb Ambedkar, in his statement on the state of education of the depressed classes in the Bombay Presidency, submitted data to the Indian statutory commission in 1928 proving that more than 50% of those enrolled in collegiate education were brahmins. Since the unemployment rate among the educated was very high during the 1930s and 1940s, Nehru felt that they should be utilised in the task of nation building. Influenced by the British Labour Party's policy of industrialisation and socialism and the Soviet model, Nehru advocated a public sector which would occupy the commanding heights of the economy.

The Soviet model was suitably modified to suit the Indian situation without nationalising the means of production. Naturally, most public sector undertakings came to be managed and operated by educated brahmins. The important sectors of the economy were brought under the control of the bureaucracy through its license-permit *raj*. The brahmins started migrating from the rural areas to the urban centres leaving behind some of their lands and assets. In order to provide some relief to the people, land reforms were introduced but only

after most brahmins had sold off their lands. Those who held on to their lands and assets and clung on to the old traditional ways suffered. But most converted their agricultural rural property into urban property. In the process, some land got transferred into the hands of the hard-working middle castes.

Most brahmins came to occupy modern secular jobs and enjoy the highest security and economic privileges in the country. Soviet style planning was introduced in the country in the 1950s and the huge investments during the plan periods were basically managed and their fruits enjoyed by the brahmins and dvija bureaucrats. In the process, they slowly converted public property into private property. By the end of the 1980s, the upper castes had acquired assets worth crores of rupees in the form of urban property, real estate, shares in private companies and were in a position to develop an independent economy.

**W**hen several studies on social economy of Tamil Nadu revealed that the reservation policy of the DMK government had reduced job opportunities for brahmins, enterprising brahmins started developing private enterprises using public money from the centre (cf. Sundaram Finance, the TVS group). Even a casual look at our metropolis and urban areas would reveal that posh localities and government developed estates came to be occupied by the upper castes. All banks in the country are either managed or owned by them.

The Mandal Commission shows the strength of the brahmins in the Indian bureaucracy which manages around 50 % of our GNP. Further, higher education, subsidised by the public, helped them to acquire skills and subsequently become well paid NRIs.

The license raj had helped the upper castes develop private industry at the cost of the public sector. Over-time the scheduled caste and tribe people also began to be employed in the public sector, challenging dvija hegemony. In the South, OBCs also joined the ranks of the employed in the modern public sector. The brahmins, having fattened their private exchequer with public money, no longer thought of the public sector as beneficial to them. In fact, they felt that its continuation could pose a danger with the emergence of the dalits as a formidable force.

**A**s the bahun concept gained momentum, the upper castes thought that it would benefit them both economically and politically if the economy was privatised and linked to the international market. The brahmin experts in the World Bank and the brahmin bureaucracy in Delhi conspired and mortgaged the economy when the *bahujans* began emerging as a force to manage the economy and enjoy the benefits. They thought that it would be difficult to fight the bahujans if the struggle to control the economy remained an internal question and therefore conspired to internationalise it. The international manoeuvrings of Narasimha Rao towards an Aryan hegemony by combining Germany, Russia and India was only a move to curb the emerging bahun power and to get international support to crush the indigenous bahun majority. The new economic policy and the Dunkel Draft must be seen in this context.

The new economic policy has not created new opportunities for the reserved groups in the public sector and they continue to be subservient to private brahmin economic power. The arguments provided by World Bank experts that the untapped rural human

and material resources would be exploited and utilised through international markets remained a myth. The concept of a human development index as developed by these experts, if applied to the social life of the Third World countries like Brazil where similar policies have been implemented, shows that they benefit only the metropolitan capitalist groups. In the Indian context they include mostly the Brahmins and the dvija castes. This is because the international market is controlled by cartels and only helps those who are already a part of the mainstream and in a position to manipulate the market.

The bahujans being economically poor cannot influence market forces. The brahmin who has already entered the private economy and is in a commanding position both at the national and international level will be the largest gainer of the NEP. This is the dvija economic policy currently being pursued in the country. Thus, caste is being used as a source of economic capital. The value of the capital has been further strengthened in the democratic set up by using state power to capitalise the value of capital, particularly in the area of human capital through investments in education, health and so on, that largely benefit the dvijs.

**I**t is this accumulation of capital in the caste mould that helped to create an internationalised elite to operate a post-modern capitalist economy in a traditional society like India. It is much easier for this class to manage the economy by slowly transferring the public sector into their hands in the name of privatisation and globalisation. Economic reform has not abolished the traditional classification of society based on birth; rather it has further strengthened the already capitalised castes.

In the recent past, while economic reforms have widened the gap between the dvija castes and others, they have also created differentiation among the sub-castes of the dalits. This was an interesting development of the post-independence period. The differences among the sub-castes of dalits persisted due to historical reasons. When British officials coined the term scheduled caste under the Government of India Act 1935, they used purely social tests like untouchability, literacy, and distance from brahmins to identify and lump them together as scheduled castes. They did not consider other criteria such as economic status, size and location of each caste, and the distance between one caste and another. These differences have now surfaced with limited opportunities to enter the public sector and a demand for better endowed persons by the private sector.

**T**he census data shows that there are 22 dominant scheduled castes in the country, each numbering over one million. These 22 castes constitute 56% of the scheduled caste population, the remaining 44% being accounted for by more than 1000 other small castes. The problem is similar among the tribals. The socio-economic and educational development of these 22 castes have been discussed in a cursory manner by various social scientists and even by dalit leaders. The problem today, however, is that some kind of differentiation is taking place among the 22 dominant scheduled castes *vis-à-vis* the dominant and small castes. This phenomenon can be largely attributed to the policies pursued by the ruling classes in the country.

The ruling class has systematically coopted the dominant castes among the dalits in each state through identifying and encouraging leaders from only among the dominant sched-

uled castes for electoral politics. This has been done through various government welfare programmes like private social welfare hostels, IRDP, and other kinds of subsidies. These programmes have mainly benefited the family clusters of the leaders of the dominant caste in the region. Jagjivan Ram for chamars in the North, and Sanjeevaiah for Malas in the South are good examples.

**T**hough the leadership among the dominant dalit castes has helped in articulating the overall problems of the dalits in general, it has been unable to comprehend the specific problems of the small and minority castes among the dalits. It has also failed to develop a strategy of development suitable to each sub-caste among the scheduled castes. Probably as the dalit leadership in the post-Ambedkar period was in flux, it had little opportunity to study, analyse and understand the problems of the 1000 castes.

There are several castes in the country which are specific to a region. Therefore, the general policies pursued by the government cannot address the specific requirements of small castes. Even the benefits received by each caste are not uniform. The accompanying table details the number of post-matriculation scholarships awarded by each state in the country during the year 1994-95. It provides an indication of social and educational advancement of dalits, as also their entry into the elite formation since they prepare them for active participation in the modern sectors of development, including the bureaucracy and institutions of political power.

States like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra have cornered most of the post-matric scholarships in excess of their proportion in the SC population of the country. States like West Bengal,

Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Orissa and Bihar, with the largest concentration of scheduled castes, are in no position to fully avail the benefits. These regional differences indicate the inequity in the distribution of benefits among the scheduled castes living in different states.

It is evident that among the dalit sub-castes, social and economic mobility is rapid among some castes and much slower among the marginalised sub-castes. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, the Madigas are relatively backward compared to the Malas. Among the Madigas, those from north Andhra and Telangana are more backward compared to coastal Andhra. In fact, a few advanced groups among the Malas and Madigas have evolved a patronage system to perpetuate their power and corner privileges only among their families. This has provided upward mobility to a few groups or cluster of families in each caste.

**T**he location of a caste in a region within a state has both advantages and disadvantages. The caste groups in a historically advanced state like Maharashtra, where Babasaheb Ambedkar started his revolutionary movement, enjoyed an advantage over states like Bihar and Orissa where the Buddhist revolution is now only a matter of history. Therefore, people living in Bihar or Orissa are relatively handicapped compared to those in Kerala, Maharashtra or Gujarat.

The scheduled castes, particularly the numerically small castes located in the backward states, are doubly marginalised. Such double marginalisation is also possible within a state across different regions. People living in highly fertile and irrigated areas have a continuous source of income and employment as compared to people living in dry and highland areas. The scheduled castes, who are

spread in different regions of a state, also acquire the same qualities. Given the limited package of benefits, the backwash effects of development of certain dominant scheduled castes result in the underdevelopment of several small and marginalised castes within the region.

The sub-castes among the scheduled castes who have benefited from welfare programmes and education are able to utilise the advantages of modern technology. This will further widen the gap between the less developed and the socially and economically advanced dominant castes. Disparities exist even among the dominant castes, but they are more pronounced between the dominant and the marginalised castes than among the advanced. However, there

are very few studies at the sub-caste level to substantiate this point.

The socio-economic and cultural ethos of different castes is not uniform. No attempt has been made to study the diversities and uniqueness of each caste so as to develop a strategy to bring them together in the process of bahujan formation. It appears that even in the Bahujan Samaj Party no intellectual grouping has been established (except one comprising of a few bureaucrats) to analyse and articulate these problems on a continuous basis. The slogan of capturing power by a brute majority is advocated across the country without considering the specific requirements of each caste and tribe. Politics may be a numbers game, but social reform and amalgamation of different castes into

a mass is not equal to the sum of the parts. The mass is different from an aggregation of the parts when the parts are of unequal size and quality.

This is understood by the ruling classes who now attempt to play off one sub-caste against another by using the same traditional tactics and slogans. It is imminent that the castes holding power will break the solidarity of the scheduled castes which was built on the emotional issues of untouchability and exploitation. Trapped within the same language and methodology, the dalits have now started fighting each other. Sometimes this is orchestrated by the ruling classes who ultimately want to prove that each sub-caste among the dalits is also a minority and thereby not equivalent to that of any single dvija caste. Therefore, the danger of a minority ruling the majority, according to them, does not arise as Indian parliamentary democracy today is an oligarchy of castes and not bahunans (the majority).

**T**his distorted formulation needs correction. In a country like India, social democracy should provide opportunities for each caste, small and big, to equally participate in the decision-making process. This is possible only when our leadership learns from history and from the teachings of social reformers like Kabir, Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar who believed in bringing people (i.e., castes) together. Therefore, what is needed is a mass reform movement among the dalits to promote brotherhood and solidarity through inter-marriage, inter-dining and, more important, recognising the existence of each sub-caste as a unique cultural entity. Otherwise we will be unable to thwart the attempts of the ruling classes to ferment a counter revolution even before the beginning of a social revolution of bahunans in India.

TABLE 1

Post-Matric Scholarships For SCs During 1994-95

S. No	Name of the State & UT	No. of beneficiaries	% recipients to total awardees	% of SC to total population
1.	Andhra Pradesh	1,32,380	9.89	7.60
2.	Assam	41,453	3.09	-
3.	Bihar	1,20,611	9.01	9.70
4.	Goa	130	0.01	0.02
5.	Gujarat	66,871	4.99	2.30
6.	Haryana	13,313	0.99	2.30
7.	Himachal Pradesh	2,678	0.22	1.00
8.	J&K	1,965	0.15	0.50
9.	Karnataka	1,06,333	7.94	5.30
10.	Kerala	45,090	3.36	2.40
11.	Madhya Pradesh	77,097	5.76	7.00
12.	Maharashtra	1,87,708	14.02	4.30
13.	Manipur	755	0.05	0.02
14.	Meghalaya	124	0.01	0.01
15.	Orissa	24,972	1.86	3.70
16.	Punjab	19,916	1.48	4.30
17.	Rajasthan	32,744	2.44	5.60
18.	Tamil Nadu	1,18,250	8.83	8.40
19.	Tripura	3,174	0.38	0.30
20.	Uttar Pradesh	2,43,826	18.21	22.40
21.	West Bengal	85,610	6.39	11.50
22.	Daman & Diu	130	0.01	-
23.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	50	0.01	-
24.	Delhi	9,648	0.72	1.00
25.	Pondicherry	1,466	0.11	-
		1,38,294	100.00	100.00

Source: Annual Report of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

# The BSP in Uttar Pradesh

SUDHA PAI

THE dalit movement (DM) in Uttar Pradesh under the leadership of the Bahujan Samaj Party is today at a crossroads. On the one hand the BSP has constructed a strong DM based upon identity and consciousness in a state which still has a rigid and conservative social structure, and which experienced no anti-caste movement/Party in the post-independence period except the short-lived Republican party of India in the 1960s. On the other, despite considerable politicisation of dalits in U.P., the BSP has failed in its avowed goal of displacing *manuvadi* forces and introducing social change, and has compromised with these same forces. Its leadership is today faced with the difficult decision as to whether it is a DM with an agenda of radical social change, or a political party driven solely by the compulsions of achieving power.<sup>1</sup>

\* This paper is part of a larger project, 'Democracy and Social Capital in Segmented Societies', funded by the SIDA (Sweden).<sup>2</sup>

The achievements and future direction of the BSP-led DM can be assessed by examining its origins, ideology, mobilisational strategies and programmes when in power.

The BSP has certain specific characteristics arising from its origins which distinguish it from dalit parties/movements in other parts of the country. The early 1970s witnessed the rise of a number of dalit organisations in the western and southern parts of the country, such as the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra in 1972 and the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti in Karnataka in 1974. Led by a new generation of educated dalit leaders, they represented a

1. In a recent paper Ghanshyam Shah has argued that the DM in the country has reached an 'impasse' in terms of both ideology and strategies in relation to existing complex ground realities. This would apply to the movement in U.P. 'The Dalit Movement: Has it Reached an Impasse?' Paper presented at the SIDA project Seminar on Challenges to Indian Democracy: State, Market and Politics of Ideology on 24-25 August 1998, at the Centre for Political Studies, JNU.

new type of protest movement against the failure of the state to eradicate caste oppression and untouchability. They were 'liberatory', rejected the Brahminical order and state welfare and identified with the poor and oppressed. Drawing upon both the Marxist and Ambedkarite traditions they tried to form a broad coalition of dalits, non-brahmins, middle and low castes, peasants and workers.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, the BSP had its origins in a lower middle class trade union organisation of government employees, the BAMCEF formed in 1976 by Kanshi Ram, who had briefly joined the RPI in the late 1960s, but left it as he felt it was a Congress stooge. It was only later that its base broadened with the formation of the DS-4, both of which came together to form the BSP in 1984. Omvedt has described its formation as deliberate and not reactive.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, the base of the party even today is among a new generation of educated, upwardly mobile and economically better off Chamar-Jatavs in parts of U.P., who have benefited from reservations in government jobs, rather than the poorer Balmikis or Pasis. The party has remained aloof from major dalit agitations such as the renaming of Marathwada University or the more recent protests over the desecration of Ambedkar's statue in Mumbai.

The BSP claims that its ideology and strategies of mobilisation are based upon the writings and speeches of Ambedkar, but actually draws

heavily from those of Kanshi Ram, and to a lesser extent Mayawati. Together they represent a post-Ambedkar leadership which has tried to adapt Ambedkarism to the north Indian political situation. When in power in the 1990s, they have also attempted to draw on the legacy of not only Jotiba Phule but also Periyar through the Periyar Melas. Initially, the party drew its ideological strength from a criticism of Gandhi and by Congress 'baiting', without which it could not mobilise the dalits and establish itself as their genuine representative.

The Congress party, Kanshi Ram declared, drawing upon Ambedkar's description of it as a unique blend of 'capitalism' and 'brahminism', has been the main instrument of the upper castes, and therefore the most 'manuvadi' and 'brahminical' party. He held it responsible for a pattern of development in which the benefits have not reached the weaker sections despite considerable progress after Independence. However, over the years he has tried to construct an alternative ideology.

Attempting a critical analysis of the Brahminical Hindu social order in his writings, Kanshi Ram argues that it is Aryan in origin, propagates an unequal social order based upon caste not class, rests upon falsehoods and religious myths, and is anti humanitarian. The dalits form the *moolnivasi* (original inhabitants) of the land and were conquered by the Aryans only to be reduced to untouchables.<sup>4</sup> Brahminism is described as a ruling socio-cultural ideology that has succeeded in dividing the majority into innumerable caste groups, in entering and dominating all aspects of life, including politics, today. Historically he

holds that no Hindu community has ever existed, that every *jati* had its own *samaj* or community.

The ideology of the BSP, thus, is similar to that of the anti-brahmin movements of south India. However, a fundamental difference is that its anti-brahminism is more political than cultural. The basic aim is to replace brahminical political rule by that of the dalit-bahujans, as it would provide the latter better status and speedier economic advancement. 'Political power,' according to Kanshi Ram, 'is the key by which any lock (obstacle) can be opened.'<sup>5</sup> Another central tenet of the party's ideology is the concept of retributive 'social justice' which, it is argued, would correct historical wrongs and provide dalits their rightful socio-economic and political position in Indian society. For achieving these goals, capture of state power is essential to introduce 'social engineering' from above, i.e., developmental/welfare programmes for dalit uplift rather than a revolution for destruction of the existing social order 'from below'.

A central position is hence accorded to the state and the *capture of state power* in the thinking of BSP leaders. They argue that the Indian state, which is under the control of brahminical leaders, propagates its ideology through the educational system, socialising the younger generation, and thereby ensures the continuation of an unequal system. All government policies based upon such thinking have prevented the upliftment of the dalits after Independence. The establishment of a democracy and adult franchise in the post-independence period has helped the *savarnas* and parties formed by them

2. Gail Omvedt, 'Peasants Dalits and Women: Democracy and India's New Social Movements', in M. Mohanty, Partha N. Mukerji and Olle Tornquist (eds.), *People's Rights, Social Movements and the State in the Third World*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 223-241.

3. Gail Omvedt, 'Kanshi Ram and the BSP', in K.L. Sharma (ed.), *Caste and Class in India*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1994, pp. 153-169.

4. R.K. Singh, *Kanshi Ram aur BSP* (Hindi), Govind Vallabh Pant Institute, Kushwaha Publishers, Allahabad, 1996, p. 12.

5. C.L. Maurya, et al. *BSP Supremo Kanshi Ram Press Ke Samne* (Hindi), Kushwaha Publishers, Allahabad, 1996.

to continue their hold over the social and political system by means of vote-banks, money power and false promises. Hence, whether we attempt to establish capitalism, communism or socialism, it would make no difference so long as the power of the state is in the hands of the upper castes. In this situation poverty is seen as a result of social and political powerlessness rooted in the brahminical system, and not in an economic condition to be dealt with by government policies.

**A**lthough, following Ambedkar, the BSP believes in total revolution, i.e., destruction rather than reform of the Hindu social order, it is to take place not through social upheaval but the ballot box. Kanshi Ram visualises two stages by which the position of the dalit/bahujans would undergo a transformation: capturing power through mobilisation and electoral victory from the brahmins who comprise only 10-12% of the population, and a second phase when the revolution would penetrate deeper into society thereby transforming it.<sup>6</sup> The BSP on attaining power would establish real and substantial democracy which is rule of the majority, i.e., of the bahujans. Thus caste, which was used by the upper castes for oppression, itself becomes the weapon by which it is to be destroyed using the electoral system.

The mobilisational strategies of the BSP must be understood as evolving over a number of stages since the early 1980s in response to the changing political situation in U.P. During an early phase between 1985 to 1989, the BSP attempted to be both a radical movement and a party using all its three mobilisational strategies: socio-cultural, agitational and electoral. This was a phase of militant vertical mobilisation of the poor and exp-

loited, the ideologisation of caste as a tool to break the existing social order, and a strident criticism of mainstream parties. Many agitations were launched such as the struggle for social transformation on 15 August 1988, for self-respect and annihilation of caste. The party at this stage consisted of a band of dedicated workers cycling throughout the country, spreading their ideas among the oppressed sections. Although the BSP contested and gained no seats in the 1985 and 1989 Assembly elections, its base grew and it made inroads into the vote-bank of the Congress, emerging as the second-most important party in the state.<sup>7</sup>

**D**uring the second phase lasting upto 1995, the BSP moved closer to the Samajwadi Party (SP) to contain the Hindutva of the BJP, and worked as an Ambedkarite party to construct a 'bahujan samaj' based upon dalits, backwards, tribals, and the minorities. It drew inspiration from Ambedkar's conception of an 'autonomous' DM with a 'constantly attempted' alliance of dalits and *shudras* (workers and peasants in class terms).<sup>8</sup>

For Kanshi Ram, however, bahujan symbolised not so much majority as in Phule but an ideological tool to create a base for empowerment. With it he hoped to overcome the problem of not being able to achieve political power without the support of the backwards as the dalits constitute only 20% of the population, a strategy which proved successful in the 1993 elections. But the SP-BSP coalition lasted

for only 16 months from November 1993 to June 1995. The project was a failure because though the larger social identity of bahujan proved powerful enough to unite the dalits and backwards, overcoming their class interests to counter the all-encompassing Hindu identity sought to be created by the BJP, the conflict and competition among them led to its breakdown once power was achieved.

**M**ore importantly, it raised a controversy within the BSP of long term significance – whether it was exclusively a dalit or a broader movement incorporating the backwards – leading to a splinter group, the BSP (Raj Bahadur), in June 1995. Kanshi Ram holds that the creation of a bahujan samaj is at present not possible as the lower backwards are not as politicised as the dalits and lack both a strong leadership and an understanding of the need to unite and fight the *savarnas*. The fall of the SP-BSP coalition in June 1995 inaugurated a *post-bahujan* phase when the latter, impatient to gain power, moved closer to upper caste parties like the BJP and the Congress, transforming it from a socio-cultural movement to an opportunistic party.

In stark contrast to its earlier policies the BSP formed two coalition governments with the BJP in 1995 and 1997 and also forged an electoral alliance with the Congress. Paradoxically, this happened precisely when the politicisation of the dalits in the countryside had become widespread, with the movement managing to broaden its support base by the mid-1990s. A development first visible during the 1993 Assembly elections was the new assertiveness by dalits as a distinct social-political group in the countryside against the upper castes and even the backwards, with a desire to carry forward their own exclusive movement.

7. Sudha Pai, 'From Harijans to Dalits: Identity Formation, Political Consciousness and Electoral Mobilisation of the Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh', in Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *Dalits, State and Society*, Sage, New Delhi (forthcoming).

8. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 224.

6. Kanshi Ram, *The Chamcha Age: The Era of Stoooges*, privately printed, New Delhi, 1982.



The election witnessed massive participation by dalits in many regions led by the BSP. The BJP performed well in precisely those regions where the BSP was weak or not well organised. All political parties in U.P. also showed an awareness of dalit assertion and the need to gain their support to capture power. The BJP, recognising the need to broaden its base, organised *samoochik bhojans* and a dalit laid the foundation stone of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya; the JD under the leadership of Ram Vilas Paswan organised a Dalit Sena, supported the Dalit Shiksha Andolan and associated itself with activities of the Ambedkar Mahasabha. Even the IPF formed a Dalit Mahasabha in October 1993 to gain the support of the dalits in the eastern region.<sup>9</sup>

**A** second significant development which would help the DM advance faster than its politics of electoral mobilisation and coalition-building is the growing grassroots process of 'Ambedkarisation', i.e., an emphasis on separate identity, self-respect, a celebration of and widespread dissemination of the ideas and writings of Ambedkar which had a tremendous impact upon dalit consciousness in some areas. This phenomenon underlies the erection of numerous statues of Ambedkar in dalit *bastis* in villages across the state, the building of Ravidas and Valmiki temples and libraries, and use of 'Jai Bhim' and not 'Ram Ram' as a form of greeting. This has been the work of a new post-independence generation which is educated, socially aware, upwardly mobile, does not like the submissive attitude of its elders, and is determined to support only dalit parties.<sup>10</sup> The

formation of two dalit governments under Mayawati has given this process support and underlies the caste tension and violence of recent years.

**K**anshi Ram has argued that this phase does not mark a fundamental departure from the underlying Ambedkarite ideology of the DM but is only a tactical shift, as attaining political power by *any* means is both necessary and justified in the case of a dalit party in U.P. Despite the establishment of democracy, the upper castes in the state remain conservative, reactionary and unwilling to concede an equal position to or share power with dalits, whom they still treat abominably. He defines the coalitions/alliances as short term strategic associations to capture power in order to introduce social change 'from above'.<sup>11</sup>

The coalition governments proved short-lived due to differences between the partners over social policies, a problem that the BSP would have to consider prior to forming such alliances in the future. During both the periods when it was in power in U.P., in 1995 and 1997, the BSP used the opportunity to introduce a number of exclusively dalit-oriented policies in the field of education, social welfare, employment generation, and channeled a large proportion of state funds into the Ambedkar village programme.

For example, in 1995, the Mayawati government began the Ambedkar Rozgar Yojana for dalit women; the outlay on health and family planning was raised with 50% of it reserved for dalits; between 1991-97, 25,434 Ambedkar villages were identified by the U.P. government for

which a separate department was created and so on.

In 1997, realising that the government would last only six months, dalit officers were placed in top positions in the police and district administration to speed up programmes. The SC Act was used to protect dalits from upper caste oppression, dalit and Periyar melas were held, Ambedkar statues installed and stress laid upon the fact that it was a government of the dalits.<sup>12</sup> These policies led to a groundswell of support on the part of dalits but created widespread anger among the upper and backward castes.

**I**n retaliation the Kalyan Singh government, on assuming office in September 1997, announced that promoting *saamajik samarasata* or social integration among the people was its goal and sought to undo many policies of the previous government. It issued orders to check misuse of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, began a vigilance inquiry, ordered large-scale transfers of bureaucrats considered close to the previous government, and reinstated those punished or suspended by the previous government. This led to riots in October in which dalits were killed in Ghaziabad, Muzaffarnagar and Faizabad districts. In these incidents Ambedkar statues were destroyed and there were clashes between dalits and thakurs who did not approve of the collaboration between the BJP and the BSP.<sup>13</sup>

These developments have impacted on the electoral growth of the BSP. Up to the mid-1990s it was a party on

9. Sudha Pai, n. 7.

10. Sudha Pai and Jagpal Singh, 'Politicisation of Dalits and Most Backward Castes: Social

Conflict and Political Preferences in Four Villages of Meerut District', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 June 1997, pp. 1356-61.

11. Ibid.

12. Sudha Pai, 'Dalits, State and Social Justice: Understanding the BSP', paper presented at the SIDA Project Seminar on Challenges to Indian Democracy: State, Market and Politics of Identity, 24-25 August 1998, at the Center for Political Studies, JNU.

13. Sudha Pai, n. 7.

the upswing, but since then electoral results at the national and state level show that although its vote share has increased, it has not translated into more seats. Its policies in office have contributed to this in large measure. In its post-bahujan phase, social justice has been defined not only as retributive but also *exclusive*, i.e., meant only for the dalits and not the entire bahujan community.

**T**his has in effect meant a narrowing of the constituency to which the movement appealed. This has created considerable anguish among the rural poor, particularly among sections such as the MBCs, who feel that despite being backward and in many cases poorer than dalits, the BSP government has neglected them. Even among dalits it is the Jatavs who have benefited; the Balmikis and Pasis feel they have not gained much. As a result the BSP prior to the 1998 elections, despite having been in power in 1997, was faced with alienation of the BCs, a slow growth of its social base, and a lack of alliance partners which led to a division of votes favouring the BJP.<sup>14</sup>

The achievements of the BSP during its short span of existence have been considerable and significant. This has created a new identity and a counter-ideology to the *varna* system, namely dalit and Ambedkarism. It has succeeded in removing the hold of brahminical ideology and the submissive attitude of dalits, providing them with a new confidence, self-respect and hope of freedom from oppression together with economic betterment. It has provided a role model to DMs struggling to emerge in other parts of the country. In politics, these achieve-

ments have helped break down the vertical patron-client relationship with the upper castes and constructed new solidarities on a horizontal dimension. The BSP has made good use of the political space available to it following the decline of the Congress system to emerge as a strong political party in U.P.

Yet, at the same time, there has undoubtedly been a gradual regression from a radical Ambedkarite movement to a reformist party ready to compromise with upper caste elites. This has happened despite the party moving close to achieving power by the mid-1990s. This has mainly been due to its impatience to gain power by whatever means, to introduce changes from above rather than wage a long struggle at the grassroots.

**W**hile the decline of the Congress provided space to the BSP, the simultaneous rise of the BJP introduced a challenge from the upper caste supporters of Hindu nationalism. The failure of the bahujan samaj project, which could have provided a broader platform to fight upper caste domination, has been a contributory factor. Consequently, the BSP today faces a paradoxical situation. With the end of an era of a broad aggregative party system in Indian democracy, which successfully combined the interests of various groups in society, political parties now need to be representative of narrower interests and identities. This situation is to the advantage of the BSP, particularly in U.P. where caste identities have asserted themselves. Yet, in a society with numerous diversities, sectoral movements which mobilise only a segment inevitably reach a plateau beyond which they find it difficult to progress as they cannot appeal to those outside that segment. This is the dilemma facing the BSP which it must address.

42 14. Sudha Pai, 'New Political Trends in U.P. Politics: The BJP and the 1998 Lok Sabha Elections', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 July 1998.

# Understanding indignities

BISHNU N. MOHAPATRA

'Occupation is essential. And now with some pleasure I find that it is seven; and must cook dinner. Haddock and sausage meat. *I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage and haddock by writing them down.*'

Virginia Woolf's diary  
Sunday, 8 March 1941<sup>1</sup>

IN his latest book, *Beyond Belief*,<sup>2</sup> V. S. Naipaul has depicted travel writers primarily as 'managers of narratives'. Social scientists also deal with narratives but very few are content with such a reduced ambition. Often, they tend to see themselves not as managers or custodians but as creators of narratives, authors of complex but credible stories. However, this particular self-definition does not cohere with an idea of social science colonised by the spirit of 'scientism' that feels diminished by the finitude of and the imponderables in human lives.

There was a time when this idea of social science and the ambition of 'modernity' travelled together. Anything that is slippery and unwieldy was kept outside the fold of social science for the sake of precision and prediction. Instead of transforming the methods to illumine the messy social reality, they tend to make social reality shrink to appear neat and fit the methodology at hand.<sup>3</sup>

'Objectivity' *per se* is not an unworthy ideal except that when over-

rated it becomes an unnecessary burden on the social scientists. This obsession has reduced the social scientists to poor story-tellers and mere specialists in documentation. Years ago this had prompted Alfred Cobban to comment that political science had lost its grasp of politics as well as of science. I hope it does not appear that I am merely rehashing some of the distrustful views associated with the postmodernists where truth is a mere conspiracy to keep dissent at bay. Nor am I arguing that relativism is the only answer to the misplaced certitude of the 'moderns'. I am concerned with understanding, not truth. My objective has been to stretch our methodology to an extreme so that it can better negotiate the reality.

'Modernity' might have freed us from some vices of the past but it has not prepared us to escape from its own 'scientistic' hubris. As a consequence, this has not helped us to understand politics better, and worse, many significant aspects of social realities have remained beyond our grasp. The incapacity to understand, particularly the experience of 'indignities' and 'humiliation' of persons, constitutes the entry point of this essay.

It all started with a raw feeling of dissatisfaction with the ways in which political scientists tend to analyse social indignities and humiliation. I hope scholars belonging to other disciplines, though unaware of the problems specific to political science, will still recognise this feeling. Empathy or lack of it, though crucial, is not what I have in mind here. Why

1. Leonard Woolf (ed.), *A Writer's Diary*, UK, 1978.

2. V. S. Naipaul, *Beyond Belief*, Delhi, 1998.

3. I am aware that my comments will not apply to social science in all its modern guises. Nevertheless, I think they capture a dominant streak.

is it that our representation of indignities arising out of political violence, caste hierarchy, class inequalities, dis-possession and rejection of various kinds appears a dry, statistical enumeration? I am not against statistics nor am I arguing against their usefulness. Why is it that Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* offers us a compelling account of the lives of *adivasis* in India which we do not find in the most competently written reports by the state or non-state institutions? Why is it that the autobiographical extracts of *dalits* in Arjun Dangle's<sup>4</sup> book on dalit writings give me more insight into their indignities than what I find in the reports prepared by the specialised departments looking into the welfare of the 'scheduled castes'.

One may say that the varied reception is due to the differences in 'genres' between fiction, an autobiography and a report. If this is true then my question is, what do we do with these writings? How should we respond to these genres? Why is it that while analysing or reflecting on dalit politics or the lives of dalits in India, their intense experiences (personal and collective) are not taken seriously? Is it due to our methodologies?

I do not have the answers but I raised these questions with my graduate students last year while teaching a course on Methodologies of Social Sciences. Dalit autobiographies/biographies provided an exciting frame to discuss some of these issues. The texts discussed were Hazari's autobiography, *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*; D.P. Dás' *The Untouchable Story*; autobiographical extracts from Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Bread*; and finally James Freeman's much celebrated work,

*Untouchable: An Indian Life History*. These texts were collectively read following the methodological considerations outlined earlier.

As soon as the 'reading' began we were overwhelmed by the personal experiences of the individuals who had undergone numerous instances of indignities and humiliation in their lives. Quite expectedly these narratives were 'first-person' accounts that were suffused with affective elements. An autobiography is primarily a subjective document, a confessional narration, although one can discern in it an objective structure of experiencing. Our first inclination while discussing these texts was to transform the first-person narratives of the autobiographies into third-person accounts. It was not difficult to utilise these materials to bolster up our argument against the pernicious impact of the caste system on the dalits of our society. Without being fully conscious, the intense experience of humiliation of the dalits became transformed into a series of data.

It was easy to see that many students laboured under the impression that their task as social scientists was to privilege the third-person account vis-à-vis the first person ones. For them the deeply personal narration in the autobiographies needed to be transformed into social science materials in order to be used for explanations. Attempts to obtain 'views from nowhere' exact their own price; without personal viewpoints social science becomes an anchorless enterprise.

In a significant sense these writings embodied the painful attempts of the authors to grapple with their experiences of humiliation and indignities. How do we understand the emotional outpourings that came out of the memory of humiliation? It does not take us too far if emotion is kept at bay,

both as an attitude of the interpreter and the nature of materials. The argument is that without the interference of emotion reality can be brightened up by, to use a Cartesian phrase, 'the natural light of reason'. According to this view, both the interpreter's emotion as well as the emotion of the subjects to be studied are impediments to be removed for a rational understanding of reality.

Another point of view is that emotional outpourings should be taken less seriously for they are mere subjective feelings lodged in human hearts and as such can only be explained in terms of individual psychology. Sometimes the impression is that it is impossible to access the deep hurt hidden in the heart of human beings. At any rate neither helped us acquire a purchase on the materials intended for discussion.

In order to understand the texts better we adopted a strategy that jettisoned an anti-cognitive understanding of emotion. The experiences of indignities/humiliation, often expressed in a personal idiom, exude knowledge and display epistemic value. The idea here is that emotional outpourings embodied in these autobiographies did throw light on their placements in the larger society and helped bring their contexts into a sharper focus. Let me quote from Hazari's autobiography, arguably the first dalit autobiography in English, dealing with his life during the colonial period:

Although I accepted the low wages and the long hours, I did not keep the job for more than a few weeks. One day, my mistress called me to say that I had deceived her with regard to my caste. She had found out that my father was working as a sweeper, while, by my name, she had thought I was a Hindu of the caste of a water-carrier. She gave

4. Arjun Dangle, *Poisoned Bread* (translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature), Orient Longman, 1992.

me my wages to date and dismissed me. This was a great blow to me in more than one respect. She had never asked me about my caste, and I had thought her intelligent and educated enough not to bother about her servant's caste or creed. Did the words of Congress mean nothing? It simply did not make sense to me. But I was not there to argue, and I came out of her room *with feelings of loathing* not only for my caste but for all men. The only thought that came to my mind was a couplet, which was a kind of motto in our family: The one everlasting who provides for the living/ also provides for the burial of the dead. But the *memory of my shame* was not easily washed away, even by mother Ganges.<sup>5</sup>

One can excavate many a moving passages from Hazari's autobiography which carry an amalgam of emotion and understanding. Though analytically separable they are fused together. The 'feeling of loathing' and the 'memory of shame' brought his social context to the foreground, including the half-hearted faith in the Congress party and 'modernity' (particularly the link between education and liberal values). The emotional turbulence in Hazari, one can argue, generated knowledge about his own contexts and the larger frame of a caste-ridden society. In it one can also discern a voice of a critic. Let me quote a longish passage from an interview I conducted with a dalit student at the Jawaharlal Nehru University.<sup>6</sup>

Student: My father was a constable in a small town called Salem. As long as I was there in the police

quarters I was not much aware of caste. My father took care of cleanliness because he did not want somebody to blame the children on that ground. From there I came to my village school. The school was not very far from my locality. First day my father admitted me in the school and left immediately. I was attending the class and suddenly I felt thirsty and asked the teacher to go outside by raising my thumb. (You had to show different fingers to express different reasons for going out of the class.) The teacher said I can go but did not tell me whether I can have water. Immediately another fellow followed me and I was about to take the glass. It was a cement tank with a wooden lid and it was clean water. This fellow took the glass from me and told me to cup my hands. I asked him why and told him to give the glass to me after drinking the water. Then he said that I should not touch the glass. I asked again why and he immediately told me that I am a pariah. Then I asked him what did he mean by this?

Interviewer: Do you mean to say that you have never heard of the term pariah before?

Student: No, never. I told this boy why you are talking like this to me. I wear clean clothes, I take bath in the morning, I am clean. But when he insists that I should not touch the glass I gave him a blow on his face. Immediately the boy howled and I also cried. He went to the class teacher and told him that I had beaten him. She asked me why and I told her that he told me to cup my hands because I am a pariah. She appeared embarrassed. I can very

of humiliation and indignities. These interviews have been full of theoretical as well as empirical insights. I am grateful to them for sharing some of their intimate and hurtful experiences with me. This particular conversation took place in early 1997.

well remember the situation. I cried for a long time and after that I did not talk to anybody and nobody talked to me. The old aayah of the school took me home.

Interviewer: Then...

Student: When I saw my father I broke down again and shouted: 'Why did you bring me here? Why here?' My father told me many things later but at that point of time he said nothing, absolutely nothing.

This is what happened to him when he was eight years old and the feeling of humiliation, which time has not been able to erase, remains with him. At a seminar where I presented this, somebody asked whether this really happened to the interviewee or whether it was a later construction of an event in the light of contemporary political stirrings. I had no reason to doubt the integrity of my interviewee. That memory is a construction did not disturb me. I realised that the relationship between humiliation and the language needed to express it is always complex and often nourishes ambiguities. But this is no reason to despair as one is not really looking for a unique route to reach the pure source of such feelings. I was interested in mediations, not pure transparency. The question of the student, 'what brought me here' while going through the traumatic experience brings into focus the knowledge of a contrast as well as a larger context. The silence of the teacher, as of his father, were indeed loaded with cognitive elements.

Emotional experiences not only processes information pertaining to a concrete setting but also provides coherence to them. It makes visible certain relationships and helps several morally important features of a situation to emerge.<sup>7</sup> It is not surpris-

5. Hazari, *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*. New York, 1969, pp. 140-141.

6. During the course of the last year I interviewed a few dalits regarding their experiences

7. For a discussion on emotion, see Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*,

ing then that moral theorists have developed a greater appreciation of emotional experience and its contribution to moral and cognitive growth. This understanding of emotion, needless to say, militates against the view that treats it as either purely private or cognitively empty.

**I**n the process of reading the texts I was convinced that understanding indignities and humiliation is only possible once we confront these experiences frontally. It is no surprise that the representation of humiliation and pain is such a problematic issue of our times. As social theorists and citizens our responsibility lies in listening to the inchoate and muffled voices of humiliation. Why should we listen? What do we achieve when we pay attention to these experiences? This connects me to the next issue I am about to raise.

When somebody listens to the experiences of indignities of others a connection is established between the listener and the sufferer. A shared space is thus created, which is described in different ways by people. We as children of God, members of a political community are capable of repentance and transformation – all these are different articulations of the notion of a shared space mentioned above.

Kant, however, had a different emphasis. As bearers of 'reason', Kant argued, we deserve respect as well as owe it to others. Within the realm of ends he distinguished between two sets of things: one set which has a price and therefore can be exchanged and the other which is above all price and therefore cannot be exchanged.<sup>8</sup> In his discussion of dignity, Kant's accent is not really on the shared space that

people inhabit but on the separateness of individuals. To the extent solidarity among individuals is posited, it is abstract in its nature. The experiences of humiliation that the autobiographies so vividly represent are instances where the authors are wrenched away from a shared space. In other words, the presence of indignities forces the larger world to shrink. By listening to the voices of pain we allow the larger world to re-emerge. This has been pithily put by David B. Morris writing on pain: 'Suffering, in short, is not a raw datum, a natural phenomenon we can identify and measure, but a social status that we extend or withhold. We extend or withhold it depending largely on whether the sufferer falls within our moral community.'<sup>9</sup>

**H**umiliation, as I have pointed out earlier, fractures a shared world. It also forces the victims of indignities to fashion new solidarities. In the short term there is no doubt that the new solidarities have a positive impact on the political processes of our society. What happens in the long run to the victim's new-found solidarity is difficult to say. Although not discussed, it is important to remember that an understanding of indignities will be incomplete without discussing the violators of dignity. Due to a lack of space it has not been explored here. To map the collective dimension of indignities without obliterating the individual voices is the real challenge facing us. It also implies that our social science must change.

In his book *The Decent Society*,<sup>10</sup> Avishai Margalit defines a decent

edited by Carl J. Friedrich, The Modern Library, New York, 1949, pp. 180-183.

9. David B. Morris, 'About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community', *Daedalus*, Winter 1996, p. 40.

10. Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (translated from Hebrew by Naomi Goldblum).

society as one in which institutions do not humiliate people. In contrast, a civilised society is defined as one in which people do not humiliate one another. The fine distinction drawn by the author may be of some analytical value but in most cases the line that separates the two is rather thin. In a decent society, according to Margalit, the institutions do not rob people of their honour. They do not diminish a person's reason for self-respect. Finally they do not reject persons from the human commonwealth. This is not the place to discuss the book at length. Yet the author's attempt to put the issues of decency and humiliation at the centre of our concern (both as intellectuals and citizens) is indeed laudatory.

In different ways Ambedkar and Gandhi had raised the questions of dignity and decency in their writings. With hindsight one can say that Ambedkar's main objective was to create a decent society in India with the help of new institutions and by refashioning old ones. In contrast, one may locate Gandhi's enterprise primarily as one of creating a civilised society.

**M**y purpose here is not to put these two complex thinkers in two neat boxes. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism towards the end of his life and Gandhi's disillusionment with the social reality in the midst of the post-partition communal carnage show that in different ways both have articulated the need for a decent and civilised society. Humiliation does not disappear just because social scientists do not talk about it. I am sure that through the act of writing one can 'gain a hold' over it. This I consider as a crucial beginning.

Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1996. For an interesting discussion on the book see *Social Research*, Spring 1997.

# A dalit feminist standpoint

SHARMILA REGE

THE feminism that developed in the 1970s differed from the left in three crucial areas – the categories of woman, experience and personal politics, all of which were central to feminist theorisation. Though powerful as political rhetoric these categories posed theoretical problems. The category 'woman' was conceived as being based on the collective state of women being oppressed by the fact of their womanhood. As the three categories were deployed in combination it often led to exclusions around race, class, caste and ethnicity.

Since many of the vocal feminists of the 1970s were white, middle class and university educated, it was their experience which came to be universalised as 'women's experience.' Thus, sweeping statements such as 'all women are niggers' and 'all women are dalits' were made. The

ambivalence of the left towards women's issues was thus countered by an assertion that women essentially connected with other women; the 'subjective experiences of knowledge' became the basis of the theorising universal experience of womanhood. 'Experience' thus became the base for personal politics as well as the only reliable methodological tool for defining oppression.<sup>1</sup> From such an epistemological position, there was either a complete invisibility of the experiences of dalit women or at best only a token representation of their voices. There was thus a masculinisation of dalithood and a savarnisation of womanhood, leading to a classical exclusion of dalit womanhood.

The 1970s and early '80s were times of the 'reinvention of revolution'<sup>2</sup> and saw the emergence of several organisations and fronts – the Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, Satyashodhak

\* A more detailed version of the paper was first presented at a seminar organised by the Vikas Adhyayan Kendra in March 1998 at Pune and published in their journal *Vikalp*. It is part of a larger ongoing project and in that sense is not final. The paper draws upon our understanding of and engagement with the contemporary women's movement in Maharashtra.

1. Judith Grant, *Fundamental Feminism*, Routledge, New York.

2. For a detailed account of the emergence and politics of the different organisations and fronts in Maharashtra, see Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: India's New Social Movements*, Sharpe, New York.

Communist Party, Shramik Mukti Dal, Yuvak Kranti Dal – all of which did not limit the dalit women to a token inclusion; their revolutionary agenda, in different ways, accorded a central role to dalit women. This was, however, not the case with the two other movements of the period – the Dalit Panthers and the women's movement as constituted mainly by the left party based women's fronts and the newly emergent autonomous women's groups. The Dalit Panthers did make a significant contribution to the cultural revolt of the 1970s, but both in their writings and their programme, dalit women remained firmly encapsulated in the roles of the 'mother' and the 'victimised sexual being'.

**T**he left party based women's organisations highlighted economic and work related issues as also helped develop a critique of the patriarchal, capitalist state. The autonomous women's groups politicised and made public the issue of violence against women. Though this led to serious debates on class versus patriarchy, these formations did not address the issue of Brahminism. While for the former 'caste' was contained in class, for the latter, the notion of sisterhood was pivotal. All women came to be conceived as 'victims' and therefore 'dalit', resulting in a classical exclusion. (All 'dalits' are assumed to be male and all women 'savarna'.) It may be argued that since the categories of experience and personal politics were at the core of the epistemology and politics of the Dalit Panther and the women's movement, this resulted in a universalisation of what in reality was the middle class, upper caste women's experience or alternatively the dalit male experience.

The autonomous women's groups of the early 1980s remained

largely dependent on the left framework even as they challenged it. As the women's movement gathered momentum, sharp critiques of mainstream conceptualizations of work, development, legal processes and the state emerged leading to several theoretical and praxiological reformulations. Debates on class versus patriarchy were politically enriching for both parties to the debate. It must be underlined that many of the feminist groups broadly agreed that in the Indian context a materialistic framework was central to the analysis of women's oppression. However, in keeping with their roots within the 'class' framework, they made greater effort to draw commonalities across class than caste or community.

This is apparent in the major campaigns launched by the women's movement during this period. The absence of an analytical frame, which in the tradition of Phule and Ambedkar viewed caste hierarchies and patriarchies as intrinsically linked, is apparent in the anti-dowry, anti-rape and anti-violence struggles of the women's movement.

**A**n analysis of the practices of the caste basis of violence against women reveals that while the incidence of dowry deaths and violent control and regulation of their mobility and sexuality by the family is frequent among the dominant upper castes, dalit women are more likely to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault and physical violence at the work place and in public.

Consider the statements issued by the women's organisations during the Mathura rape case. While the NFIW looked at rape in 'class' terms, the socialist women talked in terms of the 'glass vessel cracking' and therefore in terms of loss of honour, and the AWC provided psychological expla-

nations of the autonomous women's groups highlighting the use of patriarchal power.<sup>3</sup> Looking back at the anti-rape agitation, it is apparent that the sexual assaults on dalit women in Marathwada during the 'namantar' movement did not become a nodal point for such an agitation, in fact they come to be excluded. The campaign therefore became more of a single issue one.

**C**onsider also the campaign against dowry. While the left women's organisations viewed dowry in terms of the ways in which capitalism was developing in India, the autonomous women's groups focused on patriarchal power/violence within the family. The present practices of dowry need to be viewed in the context of processes of Brahmanisation and their impact on marriage practices. That the Brahmanic ideals led to a preference for dowry marriage is well documented. In fact it was the colonial establishment of the legality of the Brahma form of marriage that institutionalised and expanded the dowry system. The Brahmanising castes adopted the Brahma form of marriage over the other forms and thereby established 'dowry' as an essential ritual.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the principle of endogamy and its coercive and violent perpetuation through collective violence against inter-caste alliances are crucial to the analysis of dowry.

The relative absence of caste as a category in the feminist discourse on

3. For a detailed account see Supriya Akerkar, 'Theory and Practice of Women's Movement in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, no. 17, 1995, WS 2-24.

4. See Sharad Patil, *Dasa-Shudra Slavery*, 1982, Allied Publishers, Bombay. This text is significant to all those seeking to develop a non-Brahmanical feminist historiography. It is rather unfortunate that there has been little debate on the text and it remains outside the mainstream feminist discourse.



violence has also led to the encapsulation of the Muslim and Christian women within the understanding of 'talaq' and 'divorce'. In retrospect, it is clear that while the left party based women's organisations collapsed caste into class, the autonomous women's groups collapsed caste into sisterhood, both leaving Brahminism unchallenged. Though the movement did address issues concerning women of the dalit, tribal and minority communities and has made substantial gains, a feminist politics centring around the women of the most marginalised communities could not emerge.

**T**he history of agitations and struggles of the second wave of the women's movement is a history of articulations of strong anti-patriarchal positions on different issues. Issues of sexuality and sexual politics, which are crucial for a feminist politics, remained largely within an individualistic and lifestyle frame. Since issues of sexuality are intrinsically linked to caste, addressing sexual politics without challenging Brahminism results in lifestyle feminism. During the post-Mandal agitations and the caste violence at Chunduru and Pimpri Deshmukh in Maharashtra, women of the upper castes were invoked as feminist subjects – assertive, non-submissive and protesting against injustice done to them as women and as citizens.

In the anti-Mandal protests young middle class women declared that they were against all kinds of reservations (including those for women); they mourned the death of merit and explicated that they were out to save the nation.<sup>5</sup> At Pimpri

Deshmukh in Maharashtra, following the brutal killing of a dalit *kotwal* (also an active mobiliser for the local Buddha Vihar) by upper caste men, upper caste women publicly complained that he had harassed them and was sexually perverted. They claimed to have incited their men to protect their honour, thereby invoking the agency of upper caste women. The issue was not merely one of molestation or of violence against dalits, but one that underlines the complex reformulations that Brahmanical patriarchies undergo in order to counter collective dalit resistance.

The increasing visibility of dalit women in power structures as sarpanch, as members of the panchayat and in the new knowledge-making processes (such as Bhanwari Devi's intervention through the Saathin programme) has led to an increased backlash against dalit women. The backlash is expressed through a range of humiliating practices and often culminates in rape or the killing of their kinsmen. Such incidents underline the need for a dialogue between dalit and feminist activists since inter-caste relations at the local level may be mediated through a redefinition of gendered spaces. The emancipatory agenda of the dalit and women's movements will have to be sensitive to these issues and underline the complex interplay between caste and gender as structuring hierarchies in society.

**I**n times of globalisation and Hindutva, gender issues are being appropriated as cultural issues. This calls for a reformulation of our feminist agenda, to reclaim our issues and reconceptualise them such that feminist politics poses a challenge to the caste/class conceptualisation of Brahmanical Hindutva. Such a re-conceptualisation calls for a cri-

tique of Brahmanical hierarchies from a gender perspective. Such critiques have the potential of translating the discourse of sexual politics from individual narratives to collective contestations of hierarchies. In the Brahmanical social order, the caste based and sexual divisions of labour are intermeshed such that elevation in caste status is preceded by the withdrawal of women of that caste from productive processes outside the private sphere. Such a linkage operates on presumptions about the accessibility of the sexuality of lower caste women because of their participation in social labour. Brahminism in turn locates this as a failure of lower caste men to control the sexuality of their women and underlines it as a justification of their impurity. Thus gender ideology legitimises not only structures of patriarchy but also the very organisation of caste.

**D**rawing upon Ambedkar's analysis, caste ideology (endogamy) is the very basis of the regulation and organisation of women's sexuality. Hence caste determines the division of labour, both sexual division of labour and division of sexual labour. Brahmanisation is a two way process of acculturation and assimilation and throughout history there has been a Brahmanical refusal to universalise a single patriarchal mode. Thus the existence of multiple patriarchies is a result of both Brahmanical conspiracy and of the relation of the caste group to the means for production. There are therefore both discrete (specific to caste) as well as overlapping patriarchal arrangements.

Hence women who are sought to be united on the basis of systematic overlapping patriarchies are nevertheless divided on caste/class lines and by their consent to patriarchies and their compensatory structures. If feminists

5. See Susie Tharu and Tejswani Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender in India', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 22, March-April 1994.

have to challenge these divisions, their mode of organisation and struggles 'should encompass all of the social inequalities that patriarchies are related to, embedded in and structured by.' 'Does the recent assertion of different voice of dalit women challenge these divisions? A review of the non-Brahmanical renderings of women's liberation in Maharashtra is called for.

**I**n the 1990s, there were several independent and autonomous assertions of dalit women's identity; a case in point is the formation of the National Federation of Dalit Women and the All India Dalit Women's Forum. At the state level, the Maharashtra Dalit Mahila Sanghatana was formed in 1995. A year earlier, the women's wing of the Bharatiya Republican Party and the Bahujan Mahila Sangh set up the Bahujan Mahila Parishad. In December 1996, at Chandrapur, a 'Vikas Vanchit Dalit Mahila Parishad' was organised and a proposal to commemorate 25 December (the day Ambedkar set fire to the *Manusmriti*) as *Bharatiya Stree Mukti Divas* was advanced. The Christi Mahila Sangharsh Sanghatana, an organisation of dalit-Christian women was established in 1997. Though these organisations have advanced different non-Brahmanical ideological positions, they have come together on several issues such as the celebration of the Bharatiya Shree Mukti Divas and on the issue of reservations for OBC women in parliamentary bodies.

The emergence of autonomous dalit women's organisations has led to a major debate, sparked off by the essay 'Dalit Women Talk Differ-

ently'.<sup>7</sup> A series of discussions around the paper were organised in Pune by different feminist groups. A two day seminar was also organised by Alochana, Centre for Research and Documentation on Women, in June 1996. Subsequently, two significant responses to the emergence of autonomous dalit women's organisations – one by Kiran Moghe of the Janwadi Mahila Sanghatana and the other by Vidyut Bhagwat – presented the issues at stake. At the seminar, Gopal Guru argued that to understand the dalit women's need to talk differently, it was necessary to delineate both the internal and external factors which have a bearing on this phenomenon.

**H**e located their need to talk differently in a discourse of dissent against the middle class women's movement, as also the dalit male movement and the moral economy of the peasant movements. In a note of dissent, he argued against their exclusion from both the political and cultural arenas. He further underlined that social location determines the perception of reality and therefore the representation of dalit women's issues by non-dalit women was less valid and less authentic. Though Guru's argument is well taken and we agree that dalit women must name the difference, a privileging of knowledge claims on the basis of direct experience as authentic may lead to a furthering of narrow identity politics. Such a narrow frame may well limit the emancipatory potential of the dalit women's organisations as also their epistemological standpoints.

Though the left party based women's organisations have viewed the emergence of autonomous women's organisations as a setting up of a sepa-

rate hearth, they feel that Hindutva and the new economic policy have brought both formations closer, that the autonomous women's groups have once again come to share a common platform with the left. The subtext of the argument is that autonomy *ipso facto* is limiting, and that the dalit women's autonomous organisations would face a threat from the masses in case they did not retain the umbilical relation with the Republican Party. In such a context, their efforts would be limited by the focus on the experiential and the intricacies of funding.

**I**n a critique of Moghe's position, Bhagwat argued that her position was lacking in self-reflexivity and that the enriching dialectics between the left parties and the autonomous women's groups had been overlooked in highlighting only one side of the story. To label any new autonomous assertion from the marginalised as 'identitarian and limited to experience', she argues, is to overlook the history of struggles by groups to name themselves and their politics.

Several apprehensions were raised about the Dalit Mahila Sanghatana's likelihood of becoming a predominantly neo-Buddhist women's organisation. Pardeshi rightly argued that such apprehensions were insensitive and overlooked the historical trajectory of the growth of the dalit movement in Maharashtra. Yet she also cautioned that a predominantly neo-Buddhist, middle class leadership could have politically limiting consequences. For instance, she argued that at many of the proceedings of the Parishad, Brahmanisation came to be understood within a narrow frame of non-practice of trisaran and pan-chasheel. Such a frame could limit the participation by middle caste women.<sup>8</sup>

6. Kumkum Sangari's analysis of multiple and discrete patriarchies has been a significant contribution to feminist theorisation in the Indian context. See Kumkum Sangari, 'Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 December 1995.

7. Gopal Guru, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14-21 October 1995, pp. 2548-49.

There are as of today, at least three major contesting and overlapping positions which have emerged from the struggles and politics of dalit women in Maharashtra. The earliest well-defined position is the Marxist/Phule/Ambedkarite position of the Satyashodak Mahila Sabha.<sup>9</sup> A position emerging out of the dalit-bahujan alliance is that of the Bahujan Mahila Mahasangh (BMM) which critiques the Vedic Brahmanical tradition and seeks to revive the bahujan tradition of the 'adimaya'.

**I**t criticizes the secular position as Brahmanical and individualistic and underlies the Ambedkarite conceptualization of dhamma in community life. It opposes the common civil code and upholds customary law and community based justice. Significantly, the BMM seeks to combine both the struggle for political power and a cultural revolution in order to revive and extend the culture of bahujans.<sup>10</sup> Such a position is crucial to the problematisation of the dominant Brahmanical culture and thereby underlines the materiality of culture. Yet it faces the danger of glorifying bahujan familial and community practices, since all traces of patriarchal power are negated by viewing them as a result of the processes of Brahmanisation.

8. The issue was debated in the Sunday edition of *The Maharashtra Times*, Mumbai, 7 and 15 September, and in the *Samaj Prabhodan Patrika*, April-May 1996. A detailed discussion on Ambedkar and the question of women's emancipation in India is found in *Dr. Ambedkar ani Stree Mukti Vaad* by Pratima Pardeshi, 1997. An English translation has been published by the Women's Studies Centre, University of Pune.

9. For more details see Sharad Patil, *Marxvaad - Phule-Ambedkarvaad*, Sugava Prakashan, Pune, 1994.

10. Rekha Thakur, *Adimayachi Mukti*, Prabuddha Bharat Publications, Mumbai, 1996.

The Dalit Mahila Sanghatana has criticized the persistence of 'manuvadi sanskriti' in the dalit male who otherwise traces his lineage to a Phule-Ambedkarite ideology. The Sanghatana proposes to foreground the most dalit of dalit women in its manifesto. The Christi Mahila Sangharsh Sanghatana, a dalit Christian women's organisation, in its initial meetings debated the loss of traditional occupations of the converts, their transfer to the service sector, the hierarchies among the Christians by caste and region, and the countering of oppositional forces led by the church and state level Christian organisations.

**T**hese non-Brahmanical renderings of feminists politics have contributed to some self-reflexivity among the autonomous women's groups. Their responses can be broadly categorised as (a) a non-dialectical position of those who while granting that though historically it is now important that dalit women assume leadership, do not revision a non-Brahmanical feminist politics for themselves; (b) the left position which collapses caste into class and continues to question the distinct materiality of caste and has registered dissent to the declaration of 25 December as Bharatiya Stree Mukti Divas; (c) a self-reflexive position of those autonomous women's groups who recognise the need to reformulate and revision feminist politics since the non-Brahmanical renderings are viewed as more emancipatory. It is apparent that the issues underlined by the new dalit women's movement go beyond the naming of dalit women and call for a revolutionary epistemological shift to a dalit feminist standpoint.

The intellectual history of feminist standpoint theory can be traced to insights provided by Marx, Engels

and Lukacs into the standpoint of the proletariat. A social history of standpoint theory focuses on what happens when marginalised peoples begin to gain public voice. The failure of dominant groups to critically and systematically interrogate their privileged position leaves them crippled, scientifically and epistemologically. A dalit feminist standpoint is viewed as emancipatory since the subject of its knowledge is embodied and visible (i.e. the thought begins from the lives of dalit women and these lives are present and visible in the results of the thought). This position claims a higher emancipatory status than other positions and counters pluralism and relativism which posit all knowledge-based and political claims as valid in their own way.

**I**t emphasises individual experiences within socially constructed groups and focuses on the hierarchical, multiple, changing structural power relations of caste, class and ethnicity which construct such groups. It is obvious that the subject/agent of dalit women's standpoint is multiple, heterogeneous and even contradictory, i.e., the category 'dalit woman' is not homogenous. Such a recognition underlines the fact that the subject of dalit feminist's liberatory knowledge must also be the subject of every other liberatory project and this requires a sharp focus on the processes by which gender, race, class, caste, and sexuality all construct each other. Thus, the dalit feminist standpoint itself is open to liberatory interrogations and revisions.<sup>11</sup>

11. The discussion on feminist standpoint epistemology is largely influenced by Sandra Harding, 'Subjectivity, Experience and Knowledge: An Epistemology from/for Rainbow Coalition Politics', in J. Pieterse (ed), *Emancipations: Modern and Postmodern*, Sage, New Delhi, 1991.

The dalit feminist standpoint which emerges from the practices and struggles of dalit women may originate in the works of dalit feminist intellectuals, but it cannot flourish if it is isolated from the experiences and ideas of other groups and must educate itself about the histories, preferred social relations, the utopias and the struggles of the marginalised. A transformation from 'their cause' to 'our cause' is feasible for subjectivities *can* be transformed. By this we do not argue that non-dalit feminists can 'speak as' or 'for the' dalit women but they can 'reinvent' themselves as dalit feminists. Such a position, therefore avoids the narrow alley of direct experience based 'authenticity' and narrow 'identity politics'.

For many of us, non-dalit feminists, such a standpoint is more emancipatory in that it rejects more completely the relations of rule. Thus, adopting a dalit feminist standpoint position means sometimes losing, sometimes revisioning the 'voice' that we as feminists had gained in the 1980s. This process, we believe, is one of transforming individual feminists into oppositional and collective subjects.

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# On a dalit woman's testimonio

M. S. S. PANDIAN

In fact, nostalgia and remembering are in some sense antithetical, since nostalgia is a forgetting, merely regressive, whereas memory may look back in order to move forward and transform disabling fictions to enabling fictions, altering our relation to the present and future.<sup>1</sup>

Emphasising popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history.<sup>2</sup>

THE arrival of dalit literary criticism and dalit literature in Tamil, which more or less coincided with the birth centenary celebrations of Ambedkar, occasioned much anxiety and rage among the gate-keepers of the literary establishment. It was not an unpredictable moment when both the right and the left of the literary establishment joined hands in reviling this new corpus of writing which marked itself out as distinctly dalit and, through multiple and hitherto unavailable modes of interrogation and re-readings, rendered vulnerable and uncertain the received commonsense about what is sacred and profane in literature. Scurrying around for newer defences, the literary establishment labelled this new literary discourse as anarchist and divisive.<sup>3</sup>

1. Gayle Greene, 'Feminist Fiction and Use of Memory', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 16, no. 2, Winter 1991.

2. George Yudice, 'Testimonio and Postmodernism', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 18, no. 3, Summer 1991.

3. For an account of the hostility towards dalit literary criticism and dalit literature in Tamil Nadu by the literary establishment, see

Contestation being its lifeline, dalit literary discourse could not but proliferate in the face of such hostility. After an unconventional expedition into the much-acclaimed landscape of Tamil classical literature, Raj Gowthaman returned with untold tales of other truths. If certain invocation of aesthetics had earlier recovered this body of literature as a sign of Tamil accomplishment, Gowthaman unearthed in it sordid, demeaning representations of dalits and their cultural universe. What is more, the flipside of its high-flown moralising and cannons of proper living was, for him, none other than a technology of inferiorising and disciplining the recalcitrant underprivileged—those who were outside the caste society, women and so on.<sup>4</sup> As much as the literature of the so-called classical era, contemporary Tamil literature too could no longer find the going easy. Pudumaipithan's prose and fiction, bloodied in the new literary confrontation, could no longer circulate as unproblematic texts of rebelliousness.<sup>5</sup>

V. Arasu, 'Tamil Siruppathirigai Choolalum Dalit Karuthadalam', in Ravikumar (ed.), *Dalit: Kalai-Illakiyam-Arasiyal*, Dalit Kalaivizha Kuzhu, Neyveli, 1996.

4. See, for instance, Raj Gowthaman, *Aram/Adikaaram*, Vidiyal Padippagam, Coimbatore, 1997. For a preliminary analysis of Raj Gowthaman's writings, see M.S.S. Pandian, 'Stepping Outside History? New Dalit Writings from Tamil Nadu', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation State*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

5. A. Marx, 'Pudumaipithanin Pirathigalil Dalithugal, Maravarkal, Krishnavarkal,

It is in this milieu where the certitudes of the past looked feeble, Bhama's *Karukku*, perhaps the first dalit testimonial narrative in Tamil, was published in 1992, to be quickly followed by a reprint in 1994.<sup>6</sup> In *Karukku*, Bhama describes her village, her childhood, her world of labour, education in different institutions, the annoying presence of casteism encountered in them, her Christian upbringing, her growing awareness of the play of caste among the clergy and the congregation, joining the Catholic order as a nun, and her disenchantment and parting of ways with the same. While such a synopsis of Bhama's text would impoverish it to resemble a regular autobiography, it is indeed not an autobiography. As Mark s.j. mentions in his foreword to *Karukku*, 'At the first sight it reads like a history of a village. From another angle, it reads like an autobiography. From yet another angle, it reads like a brilliant novel.' In other words, Bhama's is a case of willfully violating genre boundaries.

This act of violating genre boundaries is where Bhama's narrative, even as it verbalises her own life story, depletes rather effortlessly the autobiographical 'I', an outcome of bourgeois individualism, and displaces it with the collectivity of the dalit community. Her story, to put it differently, refuses to be her own but that of others too. *Karukku* achieves this through a range of textual strategies.

**F**irst of all, Bhama's narrative, to a great degree, does not deal with herself, but the context of dalit life in which she grew up and acquired a certain self-awareness. Her descriptions

of her childhood and the world of dalit labour, which constitute a substantial part of her narrative, are marked for the most part by a compelling absence of herself. In *Karukku*, Bhama's childhood comes to life in a series of cameos on collectivity—childhood games which *they* played and left behind at different stages of their lives, the festivities of the Christian calendar—Easter, Christmas and New Year—in which *they* partook year after year with much excitement, sharing of game meat brought to the village by men who habitually forayed into the adjacent hills accompanied by hunting dogs and so on.

**B**hama's account of the world of dalit labour, in the same vein, journeys through a generalised, but detailed, description of diverse forms of arduous, underpaid and unpaid jobs that dalit men and women perform—ploughing, manuring, sowing, weeding, harvesting, digging wells, collecting firewood, baking bricks and so on. In this thick description, which interweaves righteous anger at the downgrading of exacting physical labour and simultaneous pride in the skill involved in it, Bhama's own presence as a child getting bruised while collecting firewood in the forest or dehusking groundnuts for the landed Naicker families during school vacation is merely anecdotal. It is as though the autobiographical 'I' does not have an autonomous life outside the collective 'we'.<sup>7</sup>

This absence of 'I' gets its further affirmation in the polyphony of other voices from the dalit community which saturate *Karukku*. When Bhama was eleven, she witnesses the battle-like confrontation in the local cemetery between the dalits of her village

and the upper caste Saliyars, the consequent raids by policemen, dalit men escaping into safety in the forests and the hills, and deaths due to police brutality. The narration of this childhood event, which occupies considerable space in the book, is a telling instance of how Bhama's text, instead of privileging her own voice, functions as a site for the criss-crossing of multiple voices from within her community.

**W**e, as much as Bhama, learn from her grandmother what the police would do to the arrested men. It is the whispers of women overheard by Bhama which informs us of the fate of the dalits in the hands of the policemen, and we get a feel of dalit anger at the cowardice of the Saliyars from the words—swear words included—of Thavasi Kelavi, an old woman. And finally it is a series of quotations from unnamed members of the village which discloses to us the mood of celebration and stock-taking when the verdict of the court goes in favour of the dalits. Bhama's is, thus, one among a community of voices.

At another level the strategy of erasing specificities by masking them with a veil of anonymity, lifts the narrative from the local and turns it into a universal statement about oppression. The village in *Karukku* goes unnamed; those upper caste Saliyars who attacked the dalits in her childhood days go unnamed; the dalit headman, who hid himself in their

Matrum Idara Mamisa Padchinigal', in P. Krishnaswami (ed.), *Pudumaippithan Illakiya ithadam*, Kaaviya, Bangalore, 1995.

6. Bhama, *Karukku*, Samudaya Sinthanai Seyal Aaivu Mayyam, Madurai, 1994.

7. On the essential feature of *testimonio* as of the community and not of the individuated self, see Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney,

'Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 18, no. 3, Summer 1991; George Yudice, 'Testimonio and Postmodernism'; and John Beverley, 'The Margin at the Centre: On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (ed.), *Decolonising the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1992.

house to escape the raiding policemen, goes unnamed; the village priest, an upper caste partisan, goes unnamed; the schools and the college where she studied and suffered caste go unnamed; the nunnery and its residents, once again steadfast believers in caste, go unnamed.

To name is to exercise power. But a deliberate refusal to name can enable a politics of collectivity. In this case, the shroud of anonymity frees events, persons and institutions from the possibility of individuation and renders them as general. Anonymity thus becomes a mode of invoking larger solidarities. In contrast, those who get named in *Karukku* are the ones who are so ordinary that they would be part of the dalit community anywhere else: Ponthan, the consummate thief who could dodge even the *ayyankatchi padai* (the marching battalion of demons, big and small); Kaaman, the village idiot whose skill in making gruel is as good as that of any woman; Oodan, a habitual wife-beater who could tease his flute into brilliant music, and so on.

**H**owever, the very life trajectory of Bhama is one of drifting away from the world of dalits. Access to modern education, salaried employment and the material comforts of the nunnery, which takes her away from the world of physical labour and struggle for livelihood, are some of the moments of this deep alienation. In narrating these events, *Karukku* is suffused with a sense of guilt, a yearning to reunite with the community, and a burning desire to share its pains and pleasures. Bhama's conscious choice of spoken dalit Tamil, ungoverned by the tyranny of elaborate grammatical rules, as the medium to voice the story of her community is indeed instructive. In a spirit of defiance, it obviously challenges the authority of literacy over

orality, a divide which was ratified and nourished by Tamil Saivism or Tamil nationalism of different hues, including mainstream Dravidianism, during this century.<sup>8</sup> But at an equally important plane, it is an effort by Bhama to break free from her proficiency in standardised written Tamil, a result of her privileged education in schools and colleges, and to lose herself in the community of dalits.

A similar quest is all too evident when Bhama narrates her other moments of alienation from the dalit community. After detailing how her salaried job earned her the opportunity to indulge a bit in clothes, food and travel—all of which remained an elusive dream till then—and her new feeling of power and status, she laments about her community: 'How would they ever get these comforts?' This sense of remorse withers and gives way to a feeling of meaningful freedom only when she discards her job and the material pleasures of the Catholic order and returns to her own community. In a metaphor reminiscent of Maoist guerrillas, Bhama eloquently captures this return to freedom thus: 'After fluttering like a fish thrown out of water, now I breathe freely and comfortably like a fish in water.'

**W**hile *Karukku* is anchored in the shared universe of the dalits, this universe is, for Bhama, unworthy of any indiscriminate nostalgia. She, instead, looks for a future fashioned by the will of the dalits themselves. The very word *Karukku*, which she chooses as the title for her *testimonio*, signals this desire. *Karukku* is the saw-like double-edged stem of the palmyra leaf. Bhama has experienced the pains

8. For similar argument, see John Baverley, 'The Margin at the Centre', p. 97; and George Yudice, 'Testimonio and Postmodernism', p. 17.

of being torn by '*karukku*' while collecting firewood in her childhood. Then it can perform other functions as well: 'Dalits like me are fired by the desire to construct a new world of justice, equality and love. Like the double-edged *karukku*, they keep the oppressors slashed.' To put it differently, *karukku* signifies both the oppressive present and the struggle against it, a metaphor which connects the present with the future.

**T**he way in which Bhama unfolds the story of her growing up with Christianity and the eventual disenchantment is yet another illustration of her search for dalit agency. In childhood it was the fear of god which dominated her religious consciousness. When she left her village to join a high school, this fear metamorphosed into an intense love. As she went to college, she was overcome with a certain sense of indifference towards god—but for those times of difficulties when she solicited divine intervention. If she joined the Catholic order as a nun, it was inspired by an ambition to serve the dalits. Her discovery of barefaced casteism within the church and upper caste repression in the name of obedience led her to wonder, 'I don't know where the god has fled. For now, it is the priests, nuns and their relatives who claim themselves to be gods.'

Now on, she is in pursuit of a religiosity unmediated by the clergy. The hardships, insults and desertion by friends, which followed her after she left the Catholic order, made her despair. In the closing pages of the book she, uncharacteristically, describes herself as vulnerable as a bird with broken wings. But this moment of vulnerability is simultaneously a moment of reunion with her community in search of a liberative religiosity. She writes, 'They have understood

that they have been also created in the image of god. They have a new drive to bring back this image which has been broken and destroyed, and to live in compassion and honour. I feel that this is genuine devotion.'

Given Bhama's location as a woman within the dalit community, the invocation of community and agency in terms of a singular dalit identity is telling the story in part. Articulating concerns of gender even while recovering community as an embodiment of identity and agency would necessarily require complex negotiations. This is where Bhama's testimonio appears inadequate.

It is not that gender does not animate *Karukku*. Bhama recounts with gusto the stories of women's indomitable courage and prowess during those hard days of police raids: the story of the women who kept the policemen away from her house by hanging margosa leaves at the door which announced the presence of small pox – in this case falsely – so that her husband could stay with her; the story of her own grandmother who could hatch and execute the ingenious plan of dressing up a man in a saree so that he could escape police vigil and attend his son's funeral. We also hear about the sexual abuses hurled at women by policemen and the unintelligibility of why men are paid more than women for the same labour. But all of these fleet through the text as if they are mere fragments of a larger story. We are left to imagine the gender relations within the community.

Are we to take it as a sign of greater equality between genders within the dalit community? Or is it that Bhama deliberately refuses us the story and holds it as a secret in the face of onslaughts on her community? Only she can tell. In making us wait, she is perhaps once again asserting her own will and that of her community.



# A question of quotas

DIPANKAR GUPTA

MOST Indians do not realize that our country is not unique in having a reservation policy. In many modern nation states, and not all of them are terribly democratic, there is some form of affirmative action or reservation policy. In Malaysia reservation exists for the Malay *bhoomiputra*, in Pakistan for bringing a fairer representation among the various provinces, in Northern Ireland for the Catholics, and in North America for blacks and native Indians. India is probably the first country in the world to devise constitutional reservations, but there are many others who now have their own form of preferential policy in place.

That some form of reservation or affirmative action exists in many countries should not blind us to the many differences that exist between them. It is true that communities as diverse from one another as the Malays, the Irish Catholics and the Mohawk

Indians may all be targeted beneficiaries of reservations or affirmative action, but the circumstances of their lives are quite different. The Malay *bhoomiputras* are the dominant political community in their own country, but depend on preferential policy to combat the prosperous Malays of Chinese origin in the urban sectors.<sup>1</sup> In Pakistan a kind of preferential employment exists so that different regions in the country feel represented.<sup>2</sup> Though the policy was originally intended to accommodate East Pakistan Bengalis, it continued to remain in effect even after the formation of Bangladesh. The Catholics in Northern Ireland may be persecuted, but they certainly do

1. Gordon P. Means, 'Ethnic Preference in Malaysia', in Neil Nevitte and C. Kennedy (eds.), *Ethnic Preference and Public Policy in Developing States*, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., Boulder, 1986, pp. 95-118.

2. Donald I. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, p. 668.

not lack the skills and education necessary for being competitive in modern times.

The reservation policy as envisaged in the Indian Constitution, and affirmative action in the United States resemble each other the most. In both cases the express intention is to rely on preferential policy to uplift those communities that have been historically disprivileged. The scheduled castes and tribes in India and the native Indians and blacks in America have been victims of discrimination and prejudice for long periods of time. This prevented them from acquiring the educational and cultural skills necessary for economic success in contemporary societies. Skills, such as the ones they possessed, not only confined them to the lowest rungs in the traditional order, but did not power them to independently forge ahead when the old economy and its accompanying social relations were dismantled.

**M**odernization and industrialization did not, however, inaugurate the awareness that historical disprivileges need to be corrected. That sensitivity came with the deepening of democratic practices and sentiments. Early liberal philosophy was only committed to the market and to the curbing of monarchical authority. In John Locke, for instance, property qualifications still remained the basis for exercising franchise. Women were not recognized as being politically equal to men, and those who were not Anglican were not seen as full citizens and were accordingly prevented from occupying certain public offices. Liberty and equality had a much more restricted scope than what they enjoy today. When William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury fought against slavery they met with serious opposition even in Britain. In 19th century

England the Chartists had to struggle to give women the right to vote.

Democracy in practice today is thus vastly different from what it was even till as late as the early decades of this century. The racist, 'separate but equal' clause operated in America, particularly in relation to educational institutions till as recently as 1954. Under this clause black children could be legally disallowed from attending schools meant for white children. Even after this provision was shot down in the justly famous *Brown vs. Board of Education* case in 1954, many southern states in America refused to implement it. Affirmative action first made its appearance during Kennedy's presidency, and even then it was not powered by legislation but by executive decrees.

**P**referential policies came up when it was recognised that liberty and equality do not necessarily mean the establishment of fraternity. If the triumvirate are to go together then there needs to be a self-conscious designing of political interventions such that those who have been historically disprivileged can get a fair chance to compete as equals. Obviously, such a programme recognizes unequal starting conditions for politically equal citizens which the forces of the market are generally blind to, and indeed may even exaggerate. Therefore, while such preferential policies do not disband the market, except in extreme 'socialist conditions', the attempt is to restrain the market in certain spheres so that eventually there can be a greater and fulsome market participation.

The introduction of preferential policies to uplift the historically disprivileged came about for different reasons in different countries. In America it was a combination of factors that brought it about. The growing civil rights movement, the Demo-

cratic party's striving for a political niché, and the ideological need that America felt to stand out as the leader of the free world in the Cold War era together led to the establishment of affirmative action. Preferential policy in Canada had a different trajectory and inspirational source. The divide between Quebec and the rest of Canada prompted the politics of multiculturalism around which provisions for equal rights opportunity and minority representation found their ideological rationale.

Though the reasons, provocations and compulsions to introduce reservations or affirmative action differ from country to country, the Indian case still remains unique because preferential policies were introduced here along with the inauguration of democracy and the founding of the republic. What took about 200 years to make a tentative appearance in the United States emerged fully articulated and theorized almost at the instant when India became a sovereign and democratic nation state.

**O**ne of the major reasons is, of course, to be found in the character of India's national movement. As the British authorities kept attempting to divide Indians along caste, religious and linguistic lines, it became all the more important for the protagonists of the national movement to rise above such fissures, present a united front, and not let community spokespeople be persuaded by colonial designs. This is what led to a heightened sensitivity among the nationalists to unite communities across lines drawn by caste prejudices and religious intolerance. This is why the establishment of quotas was never seriously opposed even though some, like Jawaharlal Nehru, were very sceptical about them.

A series of surveys conducted in America by a variety of agencies

confirm the finding that Americans of different socio-economic categories are united in their opposition to quotas. Blacks too find the quota system distasteful and would not like affirmative action linked to it. The Gallup poll of March 1991, the NBC/Wall Street Journal poll of March 1994, the L.A. Times poll of January 1995, as well as the poll conducted by the National Conference of Christians and Jews in March 1994, all confirm this tendency. American law too does not allow exceptions of any kind on the question of equal treatment for all unlike Indian law.<sup>3</sup>

**T**he fact that a constitutional amendment was easily made after the *Champakam vs. State of Madras* case of 1951 to accommodate caste based admissions and preferences is quite unthinkable in American jurisprudence. This is why whenever there is any sign of affirmative action infringing on individual rights, the courts in America generally rule against affirmative action. For example, the court upheld the petition that the Regents of California University had filed against race-based quotas in the famous Steve Bakke case. Subsequently, there have been whole slews of legal decisions that have stopped all considerations of quota in their tracks in America. These include landmark judgements such as *City of Richmond vs. Croon* in 1989, and *Miller vs. Johnson* in 1995.

Part of the resentment to quotas can be traced to the time when a kind of reverse quota system was in operation against the Jewish community. Till about the 1930s many universities had an informal quota system that restricted the number of Jewish students in their campuses. Now that Jews have

'become white folks'<sup>4</sup> the fact that such a practice was ever in place fills most Americans with revulsion. While this sentiment is genuine among most Americans, their opposition to quotas in the affirmative action programme is at a more fundamental level.

**I**n order to understand public policy and its implementation in America, it is important to pay attention to the emotive bonds that define what is it to be an American. This strategy holds equally for other nation states too. Thus to appreciate the complexities of, and the complicities behind, the reservation system in India it is necessary to have an idea of how this policy found its place in India's political and social firmament. Americans do not revere family wealth the way most Indians, or even Europeans, do. Many Americans even manufacture a 'rags to riches' story just to look good and be admired. For example, Sylvester Stallone had once invented a heart-wrenching penury to wealth fable about himself that so offended his upper middle class parents that they had to publicly deny it.

The strong individualism that is dramatized in these rags to riches narratives, in many ways brings to the fore how Americans generally perceive themselves. In popular recall, America was made by intrepid colonizers who by their sheer grit and valour tamed the West. In America too, the early settlers made sure that foppish old European ways, replete with old world status considerations, were not allowed to gain ground. This American vision of themselves was further reinforced during Cold War days. Communism was demonized effectively for it was portrayed as

being fundamentally antithetical to the foundational ethic of American individualism. As America is the land of the free and the brave it was duty and honour bound to resist communism and its collectivist ideology at home and abroad.

There are other ways too in which this individualist tendency is manifested and indeed encouraged. In America role models do not last for more than a generation. In fact parents are rarely idolized by their children, and each generation must find its own stars and templates. Roles such as those of husband and wife, father and mother are constantly being innovated upon. The drive to realize oneself and not to fall back on hand-me-down role models pressures Americans to find themselves and do their own thing, no matter in which walk of life they may be placed. If there is a high divorce rate in America it is not because couples there are sexually irresponsible as much as it is because they are looking for the ideal marriage as they see it.

**T**he work place too is a site for self-expression, just as much as Hollywood studios and the play fields are. It is not at all surprising that several leading figures in 20th century commerce and industry, from Henry Ford to Bill Gates, are from America. Some of the most path-breaking films are still American productions. In the sports arena, from basketball to boxing, America leads the way in innovative styles and superlative performances. Music is another industry that carries the imprint of American experimentation with a variety of genres—from blue grass, to jazz, to rock and roll. America's fashion industry too is very unlike its European counterpart. Whereas in France, for instance, fashion is created on the drawing board by eminent designers in *haute couture* fashion houses, distinctive

3. Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Policies: An International Perspective*, Walter Morrow and Co., New York, 1995, pp. 105-6.

4. Karen Bodkin Sacks, 'How Did Jews Become White Folks', in Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (eds.), *Race*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1994, pp. 83-4.

styles in America emanate from the kind of gear young people wear when shuffling around in the mean streets of Chicago and New York. Quite like the marketing of jazz in the 1930s and 1940s, fashion innovations at the popular level were picked up by commercial houses, who then packaged and labelled them for a wider audience.

**S**een against this background it is not at all surprising that quotas should have such a difficult time in America. Title VII that backs up the affirmative action programme in the United States does not just stop at quotas. It goes further to say that affirmative action should not dilute standards in order to be more representative. The thinking behind this is obviously that preferential policies in America are there to remove prejudices that exist among individuals who are intrinsically equal. Compromising on standards would then be seen as a patronizing act, made worse by the fact that individual brilliance may cease to be rewarded.

What the affirmative action policy endorses is that, other things being equal, an effort should be made to encourage black and native Indian employment and school enrolment. The fact that the University of California had introduced a quota system, which expressly went against this formulation, led to the eventual dismantling of affirmative action with the passage of Proposition 209. Interestingly, Proposition 209 was placed by the Regents of the University of California at Berkeley and piloted by a leading black member of that committee.

It is tempting to see either the Indian or the American case as paradigmatic and the other as the exception to the rule. There are, however, some striking similarities in the two instances. In both America and India, the targeted community is a clear minority. Blacks make up about 12% of the

American population, whereas the scheduled castes and tribes constitute roughly 22% of India's population. Against this common feature it is worthwhile to factor in the various differences which can explain why quotas are so appealing in one case, and anathemic in the other. We have already said how individualism in America acts as a deterrent against quotas. Yet, to fully appreciate why this argument has won the day it is necessary to take into account some of the other specifics that separate these two countries.

**B**ut before we get down to these differences it needs to be mentioned that politics in India has always been acutely sensitive to community pressures. For example, during the Constituent Assembly debates, the sub-committee on fundamental rights observed that 'it is difficult to expect that in a country like India where most persons are communally minded, those in authority will give equal treatment to those who do not belong to their community'.<sup>5</sup> In fact on occasions the debates in the Constituent Assembly were so tilted in favour of community representation rather than individual rights that it prompted Alladi K. Ayyar to rebuke the members with the remark: 'Is this a chapter on fundamental rights or is it a chapter on discriminatory provisions.'<sup>6</sup>

The fear, quite obviously, in the minds of those like Alladi Ayyar, B.N. Rau, and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was that such undiluted concern for community privileges would erode the status of the individual and make the community a perennial interest group. Anticipating this eventuality,

5. B.D. Shiva Rao (ed.), *The Framing of India's Constitution: Selected Documents* (vol. 2), Indian Institute of Public Administration, Delhi, 1968, p. 98.

6. Ibid., p. 22.

Ambedkar, while moving the draft constitution on 23 November 1948, commented rather explicitly that it would be 'equally wrong for minorities to perpetuate themselves.'<sup>7</sup>

**O**bviously, it is not enough to say that communities dominate India while the individual occupies the centre-stage in America. Such a statement needs to be fleshed out in terms of the social milieu that makes such sentiments dominant in their respective settings. When India became independent in 1947 the democratic world had moved way ahead of what it used to be even as late as in the opening decades of this century. Thus India was striding two time scales. On the one hand it could not turn its back on the centuries of progress that liberal thought and practice had introduced in the modern world, and at the same time it did not have the necessary institutional depth to abide by individualistic norms so characteristic of liberalism. While liberal societies realized the importance of self consciously boosting fraternity after approximately 200 years of democracy, India launched into preferential policies right away with the stroke of the constitutional pen the moment it became a republic.

In America preferential policies were initiated during the Kennedy years, advanced paradoxically by Richard Nixon, and began to atrophy from around the mid-1980s. Somehow they did not seem to possess the necessary ideological thrust for which reason they remain alive but sick; more kicked about than kicking. This is largely because America prides itself in being the home of the free in the sense that communities and religious affiliations could neither be

7. B.D. Shiva Rao (ed.), *The Framing of India's Constitution: A Study*. IIPA, Delhi, 1968, p. 677.

used as a source of strength, nor the focus of abuse.

The American Revolution, quite characteristically, brought disestablishment of churches in its wake. New York was the first state to be disestablished in 1777, followed by Virginia in 1785. Gradually the remaining states followed suit and in 1833, with the disestablishment of the Congregationalist church in Massachusetts, the process was complete in the entire country. In this entire series of spectacular reversals for the church it is true that the individual triumphed, but this was really possible because the Protestants amalgamated, for all practical purposes, as a single phalanx. As an overwhelming majority it set standards for the rest by depending, above all, on its unquestionable dominance in society.

To understand how this denouement eventually occurred is not central to this paper. Suffice it to say that women and clerics took the sting out of an angry and wrathful protestant religion and made it soft and forgiving.<sup>8</sup> At any rate the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) put their distinctive stamp on the American way of life and controlled the social and cultural life in the New World. Other communities became 'ethnics' against the backdrop of WASP homogeneity, and indeed, hegemony.

No wonder ethnics such as Italians, Greeks and even Jews, strove to shed their peculiarities and merge with the powerful and influential WASP majority. The effects of this tendency are clearly visible in America today, but the process began long ago. The interesting point in all this is how such a WASP majority was constituted by deliberately underplaying the doc-

trinal differences between the extant Protestant denominations such as the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and so forth. Perhaps, as Ann Douglas suggests, 'ministers and mothers' had a great deal to do with this.<sup>9</sup>

In Europe and England, on the other hand, majority culture dominated largely because of religious intolerance and discrimination. In England, the home of democracy, non Anglicans suffered from all kinds of disadvantages. It was only after the Tests and Establishment Act was disbanded in the 1880s did Catholics become legally equal to Anglicans. The American route to majoritarianism was certainly more democratic in orientation but the fact still remains that minority consciousness was not on the agenda. When minority consciousness came about it was with reference to blacks and native Indians, but these communities were faced with a rather monolithic WASP majority whose social lifestyle and aesthetic preferences set the tone for the American way of life.

Thus even while Hollywood was dominated by Jews, the films they produced were all about WASPs. It is only now after Jews have become 'white folks' that the likes of Woody Allen have made the portrayal of Jews quite acceptable in American films. Movie stars like Paul Newman can now openly talk about their Jewish heritage. Not just in films, but in the academic world too it paid to be a WASP, or, at least to be perceived as one. The famous sociologist Robert K. Merton did not reveal his Jewish identity till well after he had retired. All through those years he put up the front of a quintessential WASP. No one suspected his real identity for he played the role of the WASP to the hilt.

9. Ibid.

The situation in India is vastly different. In some ways it could well be said that India was ahead of other democracies because it did not allow majoritarianism to congeal. At any rate, minority consciousness was dominant in the Indian political process from the beginning. The concern with scheduled castes and scheduled tribes is a sub-set of this minority consciousness. These communities were considered vulnerable not just because they were fewer in number, but also because they were historically prevented from acquiring skills and qualities that could enable them to prosper independently. This is why reservations is not really about protecting cultures but about raising the status of hitherto disprivileged peoples so that they can compete as equals and indeed be able to fight more effectively for rights guaranteed in the Constitution.

In America the presumption behind affirmative action is somewhat different. Preferential policy in this case is to combat prejudice that disallows otherwise qualified black people from occupying their rightful positions. This is why in America the principle of compensation animates affirmative action.<sup>10</sup> In India, on the other hand, it is not so much compensation but the *extirpation* of the caste system which is emphasized. This is because it is believed that the caste system left to itself would routinely bar members of certain designated castes from acquiring competitive skills of the market place.

Americans obviously tend to believe that there are qualified blacks around and it is only prejudice that stands in the way. It is for this reason that affirmative action activists too

8. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Avon Books, New York, 1977, pp. 18, 94 ff.

10. See M. Cohen, T. Nagel and T. Scanlon (eds.), *Equality and Preferential Treatment*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977.

would not allow for dilution of standards. However, in India the reservation system is based on the conception that basic skills have to be developed before the hitherto underprivileged stand a chance to compete on their own. This is probably why quotas are so important here. Compensation works best when it is individually handed out. Further, compensation makes sense when the origins of discrimination are historically recent and in some ways today's advantaged sections feel guilty of the deprivations their forebears had subjected other communities to in the not too distant past.

**C**ompensation does not work in India because the origins of caste discrimination go too far back into the hoary past. Second, compensation is effective when the benefits are given out to those who can make full use of them as and when the situation presents itself. A compensation is never given out in advance but only after a case has been made out and the beneficiary is found to be worthy of receiving it. Compensations are generally graded depending upon a variety of circumstances, of which the claimants' qualifications count for a good bit. In India it is not the principle of compensation but that of extirpating the evils of the caste system that provided the ideological rationale for reservations.

It is for this reason that the founding figures of the Indian Constitution were keen that reservations should not be allowed in perpetuity, but reviewed every so many years. But reservations were given to the community and that is why the quota system and the dilution of standards for accommodating scheduled castes and tribes had to be entertained.

Why has the reservation system been allowed to last so long though the Constitution clearly stated that there should be periodical reviews? It is true

that the lot of scheduled castes and tribes has not changed sufficiently for the reservation system to be disbanded altogether. Nevertheless the fact is that there does not seem to be any political will to curb the wanton use of quotas in India. In my view the scheduled castes and tribes by themselves could not have brought about such a political sentiment on their own. Quotas have become politically sacrosanct because the prosperous agricultural castes have taken to it to enhance their prospects in urban India.

**T**hough the Constitution left room for the so called backward castes to receive some form of preferential treatment, the wholesale adoption of the quota system is just a willful political extension of the reservation system as applied to the scheduled castes and tribes. Tamil Nadu was the first to initiate this change, which is why the Champakkam case was filed to protest against it in 1951. But by 1971, prosperous agrarian castes like the Vokkaligas of Karnataka demanded and received the benefits of a quota based reservation as they had Devraj Urs and Indira Gandhi to back them up. Initially the Lingayats were kept out of reckoning in keeping with the Hanavur Commission report. This was a political move as Devraj Urs wanted to isolate the Lingayats and win over the Vokkaligas. However, the Lingayats were eventually included once Ramakrishna Hegde came to power in Karnataka.<sup>11</sup>

The acceptance in 1990 by V.P. Singh of Mandal Commission recommendations only nationalized what was already happening in large parts of south India. These developments did not take place in isolation

but in active interaction. With the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris now becoming beneficiaries of backward caste reservations there is no question of holding back quotas, or even of revisiting them. The scheduled castes and tribes are therefore the indirect beneficiaries of the Mandal Commission and the Hanavur Commission and all that happened between these two events. Kaka Kalelkar's inability to designate backward castes on any firm set of criteria was forgotten as being too academic. The Rane Commission's espousal of economic criteria for backwardness had no takers. Quotas, instead, came to rule the day. As a result what we have is an equality of results more than an equality of opportunity.

**E**ven so, this is a big step for a country in which till recently even the shadow of an untouchable caste was polluting. We may not as yet fully appreciate the credo of the equality of individuals, but democracy in India has certainly brought about a developed understanding of equality between groups. This is why there is fierce, competitive rivalry between groups rather than between individuals. It is not as if the individual does not exist, but the tendency to refract the individual through a group rather than see it in its own light is indeed very strong.

Unfortunately, with the extension of the quota system and the entrenchment of the quota mentality, it will not be easy to make the transition from equality between communities to equality between individuals. This is where political statesmanship will be critical as it could help society either skip through, or make a rapid exit from the painful stages that come in between. A sociologist can only comment on the consequences of different political interventions, it is for the political system to ultimately make the difference.

11. Sunita Parikh, *The Politics of Preference: Democratic Institutions and Affirmative Action in the United States and India*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1997, pp. 172-5.

# Comment

Act One: Sometime in the late 1960s. One winter evening a village boy, Chamar by caste, fell foul of his landlord for greeting him in a manner that he thought was the proper way of paying obeisance to an upper caste elder. The boy, who was in his early teens, folded his hands and mumbled *pranam* as soon as he came face to face with the landlord on a narrow *pagdandi* outside the village. The landlord, in his late thirties and with a huge paunch for his age, was furious. Shaking with anger he abused the lad and showered cane blows on him. The boy's father and grandfather were berated for his 'audacity'.

For a long time to come this minor incident was recounted by upper caste landlords as proof that school education for dalit and harijan youth was detrimental to society. They argued that the harijans would no longer remain dependent on the village economy once they received education. Their forefathers had been denied the right to education. That was why the upper castes had maintained their grip over the low castes. They held the Congress party responsible for encouraging harijans to do what had all along been denied to them. They apprehended that education would inculcate a sense of equality among the harijans and embolden them so as to question the authority of the upper caste landlords and ultimately demolish their age-old social and economic hegemony.

It was an act of unforgivable misdemeanor on the part of the boy – Anand Ram. His manner of greeting his landlord had scandalised and angered the Rajputs. He had not bowed and stooped low while greeting his landlord. Instead of saying *salam malik*, the boy had mumbled *pranam* which, as he should have known, is an exchange of greetings between persons of equal caste and stature. He had violated an old and established code of behaviour.

Act Two: March 1995. A group of Rajput youth from the village drove about 100 kilometers in a Maruti 800 car to a nearby town to attend a birthday function. It

\* The names of persons and places have been changed to protect their identity.

was the first birthday of the son of a Bihar Administrative Service officer who hailed from the same village as the young men. Perhaps, it was the first time a birthday function was held in a Chamar's family from that village. The officer, Vinay Ram, the first villager from the harijan caste to join the government, was none other than the younger brother of Anand Ram, who himself grew up to be a school teacher. The young men were from the family of the landlord who had more than 25 years ago felt humiliated because a harijan boy had dared to use a form of greeting traditionally reserved for the upper castes. Some of them tried to hide the fact from village elders that they were undertaking such a long journey to attend a function in a Chamar's family.

Some Rajput elders who knew of the young men's plan had their own explanation to offer. It was the eve of the Bihar Assembly elections. The then Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, was seeking a second term in office. The village was tense and divided along caste and class lines, as always happens during the elections. Rajputs were also divided into two camps – one supporting Laloo Yadav's candidate belonging to the Janata Dal, while the others were for a notorious Rajput caste leader. Some of those who attended the birthday function were keen to enlist the support of Vinay Ram for the Janata Dal candidate. Vinay Ram was venerated among the village harijans as he was the first scheduled caste person to have risen to a high rank in the government.

Anand and Vinay Ram's father, Hari Ram, was the first Chamar to send his sons to school in the village. Jagdishpur is a nondescript, obscure village in the Sitamarhi district in north Bihar. The nearest railhead is more than 15 kilometers away. The distance of the village from the bus stop has shrunk from ten to five km in the last 30 years. In roughly the same period the profile of the village and its people has undergone a deep transformation.

Hari Ram, who was derisively called Haria (in Bihar the upper castes use suffixes such as 'a' or 'awa'

after names of low caste persons of either sex to remind them of their humble origins), was the only son of Dhangar Ram called Dhagarwa by everyone. Their determination to educate their growing children encouraged a couple of other Chamar boys to join the primary school.

Hari Ram had earlier violated another code of conduct by christening his sons Anand and Vinay – names with perfectly upper caste, Brahminical connotations. Where did the illiterate ‘Haria’ and ‘Dhangarwa’ stumble across these names? Had anyone ever heard of any Chamar with such names? This was the talk in the village once Anand and Vinay were enrolled in the school. Hari Ram was taunted for nourishing upper caste ambitions. Rajputs said that Haria wanted to inculcate upper caste *samskara* in his children.

While the Chamar elders continued to toil on the land owned and controlled by Rajput landlords, they sought to provide, to the best of their abilities, a protective and safe environment to their school-going children. They were shielded from the evil and exploitative eyes of the rapacious Rajput landlords.

The parents feared that the landlords might force them to withdraw their children from school, though they faintly understood that education was guaranteed as a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution. They were also conscious that their decision to school their children was an act of defiance against those who owned the homestead land of the harijans. Every once in a while, the Chamar school-going children were compelled to work or substitute for their parents in the fields. However, the two sons of Hari Ram, who showed early promise, were seldom sent to work. For that reason alone they were hated by the landlords. In their own community they were everyone’s favourites.

Jagdishpur is not a big village. Elders say the Rajputs settled in the village some 400 years ago. They originally hailed from Alwar in Rajasthan, though their first settlement in Bihar was in Chhapra district. They cursed their forefathers for having travelled to such a remote and backward village which continues to be ravaged by floods and remains unapproachable by road for well over half the year. If they had erred in selecting the topography and locale of the village, they were astute in having decided to provide a settlement to the harijans, mainly Chamars and Dusadhs, in the village. The harijans proved to be more docile than other low castes. Muslims were the other source of cheap labour in the village, but they were often more demanding and temperamental than the harijans.

There were roughly 50 harijan families in the village. They were settled in the northern part of the village in the neighbourhood of the Muslims. Nearly half of them were bonded to one Rajput family. Dhangar and Hari Ram’s family was the most prosperous among the Chamars even though they were yoked in bondage to Govind Singh. They owned a few decimals of land behind their house which stood on the land owned by Govind Singh’s family. Just the ownership of that minuscule piece of land conferred a special status on Hari Ram among the Chamars, though he was not inclined to accept community leadership in any form.

Hari Ram was shy, a man of few words. He seldom revealed his mind to anyone outside his community. The landlord accused him of being sly. He turned out to be more reserved and aloof after his two sons joined the village primary school. Anand and Vinay won government scholarships meant for the scheduled caste students which further encouraged the harijans to send their children to school. Hari Ram was subjected to public ridicule; he was taunted and sometimes abused for what he was doing for his children. ‘Solkans’ (harijans are called Solkans in some parts of north Bihar) should keep away from school and college education, the Rajputs said.

Hari Ram wished to escape from his employment as a bonded labourer, but he felt trapped. First, he could not feed his family without the daily wages that he earned by working on his master’s land. Second, any adventure at that stage in his life might have jeopardised the careers of his school-going children. In his youth he had tried to carve out an alternative career. He learnt to dance and sing in a village *nautanki* (dance troupe). For him it represented an escape from daily misery, 12-15 hours of hard work and repeated insults by the landlord. But the village troupe failed to sustain the family beyond a point and that was the end of it all.

Hari Ram was inspired to send his children to school by a local Congress party leader, Bhola Ram, who also happened to be a Chamar. He belonged to a village which was about five kilometers from Jagdishpur. He was the first and the only Harijan leader from the area covering several dozen villages who had attended school, though he failed to clear the matriculation examinations.

He had enrolled himself in the Congress after paying four annas or 25 paise. He frequently visited Govind Singh. Govind Singh’s elder brother was also a member of the Congress party. Rajputs often referred Bhola as Jagjivan Ram, the union minister who was a household name in Bihar. Bhola Ram too emphasised



his imaginary proximity to Babu Jagjivan Ram and often narrated anecdotes of his encounter with the great man in Patna and Delhi.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was a symbol of the aspirations and ambitions of harijans in Bihar, though it is doubtful he ever cared for them. The upper castes voted enthusiastically for him in the Sasaram Lok Sabha constituency. The Rajputs of Jagdishpur used his name as a simile to taunt any member of the scheduled castes who exhibited any form of ambition in life. Anand and Vinay Ram too were derisively called Jagjivan Ram by upper caste landlords.

Harijans of Jagdishpur invariably voted for the Congress party on the few occasions they were allowed to exercise their franchise. Later, they learnt to vote against the party that was supported by local landlords. Ironically, it was during the Emergency that they became vocal against the tyranny of the village landlords. Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi's tyrannical ways of dealing with the opposition and the people did not affect the thinking of the harijans. Hearing about Indira Gandhi's 20-point programme on All India Radio, with its emphasis on eradication of poverty and bonded labour, influenced Hari Ram and others.

The harijans and Muslims of Jagdishpur came into conflict with the Rajput landlords for the first time during the 1977 Lok Sabha election. They insisted on casting their vote for the Congress party in opposition to the upper caste landlords who supported the Janata Party. They were chased away from the polling stations by the landlords, creating an unbridgeable hiatus between them.

After the Emergency, for the first time, the harijans filed a criminal case against the upper caste landlords in the local police station. Once again, the person in question was Hari Ram. Govind Singh had abused and beaten up Hari Ram and his father, accusing them of stealing bullock cart tyres from the sugarcane field. Hari Ram had been entrusted to look after the sugarcane cart. Summons were issued to Govind Singh and his son who had to suffer the humiliation of standing in the witness box in the magistrate's court when seeking bail. There was quiet celebration in the harijan *basti* that night. They drew vicarious pleasure from the landlord's troubles and felt they had scored a great psychological victory over the landlords.

Education, elections and mass media like AIR were major catalysts in the social transformation of the harijans. Two harijan boys had become school teachers and the main breadwinners for their families. During elections, the dormant emotions surfaced and

conflicts came out into the open. This emboldened the harijans to assert themselves in other spheres of village life. Even the local *panchayat* elections polarised the village along caste and class lines. The poor landless harijans and Muslims, who never ever spoke up in front of the Rajput landlords, defied Rajput *diktats* and insisted on casting their votes. This was Indian democracy at work in full splendour.

However, the final nail in the coffin was struck when the Rajput landlords were dealt a severe economic blow in the early eighties. Jagdishpur is on the bank of the turbulent river Baghmata. As a flood control measure the government decided to tame the river by restricting its flow. Jagdishpur became a victim of the river's fury. A plan was worked out to shift and rehabilitate the village away from the river course. As part of the rehabilitation package, the harijans were allotted independent homestead land outside the village. For them it meant freedom from age-old bondage. In one stroke they had got what the zamindari abolition and land ceiling acts had failed to do since Independence. The landlords' coercive ways to extract cheap labour could work no more.

Hari Ram and others now travelled to neighbouring villages for work. They also began bargaining for daily wages. However, the local economy, the landholding pattern and the absence of any movement for increase in daily wages forced them to work at more or less the same rate. The advantage was that they were no longer in bondage. They could choose their employers at their free will.

In due course, the landlords of Jagdishpur faced an acute shortage of agricultural labour. They were compelled to hire labour from other villages who demanded higher wages. The relocation of village and annual floods had crippled the village economy. The annual yield of paddy dropped to a quarter. The worst sufferer of the change was Govind Singh (who has since died) and his family.

His sons, who were unused to waking up before sunrise till well after Hari Ram and other labourers had gone to the fields, now had to make the rounds of the harijans' *tola* (locality) much before dawn. They were forced to go to every house imploring the harijans to come and harvest the drying paddy. The labourers often ignored them, pretending to be asleep.

The harijans of Jagdishpur are now the masters of their own fate, even though there has been little change in their economic condition.

Ashok Singh

# Books

**COMMUNALISM CONTESTED: Religion, Modernity, and Secularization** by Achin Vanaik.  
Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1997.

**SECULARISM AND ITS CRITICS** edited by  
Rajeev Bhargava. Oxford University Press, New  
Delhi, 1998.

**COMMUNALISM IN INDIAN POLITICS** by  
Rajni Kothari. Rainbow Publishers, Delhi, 1998.

**IN THE NAME OF THE SECULAR: Contemporary Cultural Activism in India** by Rustom  
Bharucha. Oxford University Press, New Delhi,  
1997.

ABOUT communalism and secularism there are no certainties any more, at least in some quarters. The influence of Hindutva has raised doubts about their hitherto accepted meanings, both in popular and academic understanding. The consequent debate and introspection, though often partisan and passionate, has helped foreground the need to be sensitive to the complexities of their social and political articulations. Towards that end, these books make a significant contribution.

Much of the writing on secularism in India tends to be confined to the problematic of the relationship between the state and religion. The collection of essays put together by Rajeev Bhargava largely traverse this familiar terrain. Achin Vanaik, on the other hand, shifts the focus to secularisation of civil society, though without overlooking the question of the secularity of the state. How the weaknesses of our democratic polity enabled the consolidation of communalism is the main concern of Rajni Kothari, whereas Rustom Bharucha explores the inadequacies and frailties of secular cultural practices. Collectively these four books underline a large number of issues currently being debated among secular scholars and activists.

This many-splendoured debate, ranging from an uncritical defence to unqualified rejection of secularism, forms the core of Rajeev Bhargava's collection

of essays, which according to the author is born out of the felt critical need to work out 'an alternative conception of secularism' and 'not to seek an alternative.' Firmly anchoring himself in the secular camp, Bhargava sets out to give secularism its due. He does that by bringing together both the critique and defence and then demarcating his own position from both.

The critics of Indian secularism, outside the communal rabble, fall into three distinct categories. The first group takes a Eurocentric view wherein secularism is seen essentially as a Christian idea and hence alien to the religious cultures of India. It argues that 'Indian culture encompasses the secular with the religious' and the latter is too much a public matter to be restricted to the private. Therefore, secularism is inappropriate for the Indian situation and its adoption by the Indian state is an unwarranted and artificial imposition.

The second group views secularism as a child of modernity, designed by it to meet the challenge of religion-as-ideology to modern statecraft. What secularism does, they believe, is 'to sanction the imposition of an imported language of politics on a traditional society.' They argue that 'it is from non-modern India, from the traditions and principles of religious tolerance encoded in the everyday life associated with the different faiths of India, that one will have to seek clues to the renewal of Indian political structure.'

The third group questions the appropriateness of secularism to counter the political challenge of Hindu majoritarianism. They hold that the 'Indian state has never been and is hardly ever likely to be secular.' The protection of minorities can be ensured, not by secularism but only through religious toleration, which should be given 'a proper institutional form by allowing religious groups their own parliament, i.e., a deliberative body to decide on matters of the entire community to which members are elected.'

These three positions are represented in the volume by the essays of T.N. Madan, Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterji respectively. Speculative in character and not grounded in empirical reality, they are essentially theoretical constructs, the veracity of which

is quite open to doubt. Moreover, most of their arguments bear a close resemblance to the communal discourse and as such lend legitimacy to communalism, even if some of them distinguish themselves as 'anti-secular secularists.'

Akeel Bilgrami, though critical of the above trio, does not represent the other view which largely draws upon the Nehruvian model of secularism. Bilgrami is of the opinion that Nehruvian secularism was indeed an imposition, but not brought about by a modern intrusion into an essentially traditionalist religious population. Instead, it is an imposition because it is not one among substantive contested political commitments. He contends that secularism can 'emerge as a value by negotiation between the substantive commitments of particular religious communities.' Like some anti-secularists, Bilgrami also takes a communitarian view which is likely to lend legitimacy to undemocratic political practices based on majoritarianism and minoritarianism.

Nehruvian secularism and its refined variants are not adequately represented in the Bhargava volume. The only exception is the essay by Amartya Sen which seeks to contend with the misconceptions and scepticism in the popular mind. Rajeev Bhargava's own effort, in his words, is to 'work out an alternative to it.' Such an alternative conception he posits in what he calls 'contextual secularism', which ensures 'a dignified life for all, prevent discrimination on grounds of religion, check religious bigotry and manage frenzied internecine conflicts that plunge societies into barbarism and into an escalating spiral of violence and cruelty.' This is likely to be unexceptionable, both for the Nehruvians and anti-secularists. The problem could possibly be the prescription that follows: 'The intermingling of religion and politics is permissible as long as it helps meet these objectives but if any of blending defeats these aims, then their amalgamation must be restricted.' Whether such a perspective is likely 'to save secularism from its critics' or give 'what is due to it' appears to be unlikely.

A more careful editing, both by deletion and incorporation, would have helped to enhance the quality of this rather bulky volume. The first two sections on the 'Secular Imperative' and 'Secularism in the West' could do with some pruning. Written by western scholars, they preface the Indian debate with the European experience; the course of enquiry for an alternative concept thus seems to be pre-set. The failure to interrogate the Indian historical experience leaves out some of the seminal writings on the subject. The selection of essays creates an impression that the

editor, like some of the contributors, is trapped in the European paradigm.

The analytical framework of Achin Vanaik's excellent and incisive book is a welcome departure. He shifts the focus away from the European experience to the process of secularisation in Indian civil society, though unlike in the West the details of this process have not been fully worked out by historians in India. Yet, the broad contours of this process, socially and intellectually, are not altogether unfamiliar. The centrality attributed to this process in Achin Vanaik's work guides the debate to new pastures, thus opening up the terrain for theoretical and empirical investigation.

Communalism in India is not intelligible without a reference to the role of religion and the consciousness it entails which, in modern times, has become increasingly complex and dynamic. Understandably there are sharp differences of opinion about how to locate religion in the secular-democratic process in India. Ashis Nandy posits a distinction between religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology: the former 'a way of life, a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural'; the latter a 'sub-national, national or a cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic, interests.' There are at least some takers for this fundamentally flawed idea, if Rustom Bharucha's invocation in his analysis is any indicator. In dichotomising faith and ideology, Nandy seems to miss their inevitable relationship between what makes religion-as-ideology into religion-as-faith. Achin is absolutely right in his assessment that 'the analytical separation of faith and ideology must never be misrepresented as an actual dichotomy.'

Vanaik is equally critical of both classical Marxist and liberal attitudes towards religion. He rejects the premise of Marx and Engels that by the 19th century religion had exhausted its potential as a progressive force in society. Liberation theology, he contends, is proof enough to the contrary and also demonstrates that secularisation takes place not only against but also within it. Be that as it may, secularisation within religion is a limited liberation; it tends to circumscribe social consciousness within religious parameters and is likely to retard rather than promote the secularisation of civil society. An 'atheistic utopia' may be unrealisable; so is Vanaik's hope that religious systems would learn to become compatible with a more secular, democratic and humane modernity. What Rammohun Roy said almost 200 years ago is worth recalling: 'All religious systems are systems of deception.'

What distinguishes the perspective of Marx and Engels is the relationship it posits between religion and power. It is not to deny the progressive role of religions in certain historical conjunctures; their writings on Germany and France allude to several such instances. Yet, that religion is an ally of the oppressive classes is equally born out by historical experience. If so, a struggle – an element of confrontation if you like – is inevitably embedded in the pursuit of a secular democratic revolution. The nexus between social and religious practices in India makes this all the more important.

Vanaik has advocated elsewhere (*The Hindu*, 16 November 1997, in a review of my book, *Communal Threat, Secular Challenge*, Earthworm Books, Chennai) a multi-dimensional approach – economic, political, social and cultural-ideological – which would ‘situate the secularism/secularisation problematic within its more encompassing framework of democratisation.’ What will enable the deepening of the processes of democratisation and secularisation is a complex question. But, if secularisation is ‘understood as relative decline in religious influence’, an element of confrontation with the powerful presence of religion in public sphere is unavoidable. The manner in which that could be promoted by democratic secular forces without perpetrating violence to the existing state of consciousness is a matter that deserves serious debate. Such a debate cannot be conducted on the terrain of theory alone, but has necessarily to be sensitive to the social and political processes that led to the communalisation of Indian society, particularly during the last two decades. What imparted social acceptance to the process of communalisation was, among others, its perceived relationship with religious identity.

Rajni Kothari’s essays underscore the political praxis that made it possible for communalism to thrive. His contention is that communalism gained strength ‘mainly because of the vacuum created by the erosion of democratic institutions, especially of the party system dominated by the Congress, with no secular alternative in sight, and the failure of the state to move forward with the development process.’ The Emergency was a watershed in Indian politics; it signified ‘a breakdown in the political process’ from which the Indian polity has not yet managed to fully recover. That fundamentalism and communalism were able to enlarge the political space at their command was perhaps the most disastrous consequence of the Emergency.

Given that culture is an important domain through which communal forces have tried to expand their influence, a critical appraisal of secular cultural

activism is long overdue. Rustom Bharucha’s essays, written with a sensitivity and passion generally missing in academic discourse, is an attempt in that direction. Emphasising, like Achin Vanaik, the secularisation of civil society, Bharucha advocates a reorientation of the secular dialogue from the present ‘confines of seminars, conferences and journals on to a wider spectrum, where the language of secularism can be grounded in the struggles of everyday life.’

How this can be done is suggested through a critique of IPTA (Indian Peoples Theatre Association) and Sahmat (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) on the one hand and Mani Ratnam’s *Roja* and Anand Patwardhan’s *Father, Son and Holy War* on the other. Unhappy with the present cultural activism in India, he finds an ideal in the Third Sector movement in Brazil which is based on ‘a coalition of social and political groups, broadly structured through a popular movement, with a wide spectrum of ideologies converging around social democracy.’ What prevents the formation of such a coalition in India, according to him, ‘is the sectarianism within diverse social and political activist groups who are unable to meet through differences.’ This judgement is not fully borne out by his criticism of Sahmat which has, over the last 10 years, tried to bring together on the same platform artists with different perspectives.

The progressive-secular cultural activism can certainly do with some critical assessment and introspection, for that alone can further its creative frontier. Bharucha’s finely crafted essays are a useful step in that direction, even if his critique of Sahmat and IPTA essentially covers known territory and often reinvokes issues which were debated within these movements. Thus, he goes through the familiar ground of IPTA’s faltering interrogation of tradition, unimaginative appropriation of the folk, and the failure to resolve the tension between the political and the cultural. Yet, he rightly acknowledges IPTA as ‘an indispensable point of reference for almost any discussion on cultural politics in India.’ This is because the progressive cultural movement, of which IPTA is a part, brought about a significant break in the cultural consciousness in India.

Sahmat’s attempts to reclaim the communalised space through creative and innovative interventions has several critics, both within the left and outside. Among its many initiatives, the exhibition on Ayodhya, *Hum Sab Ayodhya*, and the cultural evening *Muktanaad* at Ram Ki Pauri at Ayodhya have received most critical acclaim and disapproval. The exhibition was appreciated for its secular interpretation of the

history and culture of Ayodhya whereas Muktnaad was seen as a bold and daring attempt to break the communal siege at Ayodhya.

While recognising the importance of these activities as well as Sahmat's other initiatives at Mangolpuri and Mumbai to sensitise the exploited and the marginalised to our secular ethos, Bharucha advances three major criticisms: the dependence on the state for funding, dichotomisation of the traditional and the contemporary, and the inability or unwillingness to incorporate the local people through a dialogue with them.

For organising Muktnaad at Ayodhya, Sahmat received funds from the state, 'not without usual bureaucracy' as Bharucha states, 'but through the normal channels and procedures prescribed by the state.' By equating the state with the government, it is alleged that the money was gifted by the Congress and that too by its factional leader, Arjun Singh, heading the ministry of culture. If it is not appropriate to identify the state with the government and the party which runs it, it is only legitimate for public organisations to claim earmarked money from the exchequer.

Such claims need not lead to 'unquestioned statist loyalties', particularly when the money is used for socially and politically progressive purposes. In a democracy 'the principled distance' from the state needs to be negotiated through the extent of freedom demanded and obtained. That the radical intelligentsia in India is able to function in institutions funded by the state is because of the autonomous space available within them, which is required to be constantly defended and struggled for in order to guard against what Gramsci calls 'transformism'. In criticising Sahmat on this score, Bharucha like some others appears to be influenced by an element of 'romantic radicalism' which fails to take cognisance of the democratic possibilities within a bourgeois state.

The criticism of Sahmat for interacting with the Delhi police in a bid to sensitise this communally-prone force is equally misplaced. It is indeed true that Delhi policemen were 'notoriously involved in the engineering of pogroms, notably against the Sikhs in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination.' At the same time there are instances of policemen taking initiatives to form *mohalla* committees as in Bhiwandi and Mumbai for preventing communal riots, which the author quotes with approval. Within the police, therefore, both possibilities exist: to be on the side of the communal and also to act against it. While the former is to be opposed and condemned, the latter deserves to be supported and promoted.

However, Bharucha is critical of Sahmat for helping the police in their anti-communal campaign, for he believes that what Sahmat did was to help organise readings 'for the gratification of a supposedly cultured police force.' In fact, it was an evening of *mushaira* at communally sensitive Chandni Chowk, in which some of the outstanding poets known for their anti establishment and secular views brought to the audience, mostly locals, the pathos of communal hatred. If reclaiming the communalised space is a necessary task, it would be unwise to leave out the men who man the state institutions, be they in the police, bureaucracy or army. And if any of them is prepared to serve the cause, as the Delhi police did by observing an anti-communal week, it would have been counter-productive to isolate them for the past mistakes of some of their colleagues.

Held in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid and in the teeth of opposition from communal organisations like the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, it is but natural that Muktnaad was noticed for its political import. In the process, its significance as a secular cultural event is generally overlooked. It brought together on the Sahmat platform practitioners of diverse forms of art for whom, whatever the idiom and language, art is essentially humane and secular. Thus Kelucharan Mahapatra, Sitara Devi and Rajan and Sajan Misra delved into the tradition to foreground the universal.

Bharucha has rightly sensed that Sitara Devi rendering Ram Dhun in a location where a mosque was destroyed has secular significance. Hence it also has a contemporary resonance. If so, the distinction between the traditional and the contemporary loses much of its edge. At any rate Muktnaad neither dichotomised nor prioritised the traditional and the contemporary, as the author believes, for the very format of Muktnaad did not admit of any such division. The rather unstructured way in which the programme evolved through the night broadly underlined the contemporary ambience and nuances traditional art forms gained through contextualisation.

Sahmat's alleged elitist character has by now become a widespread belief. At the time of the Hum Sab Ayodhya exhibition even a left politician commented on its high-flying image. In the reckoning of some, the emphasis on classical forms appears to be one of the reasons. Bharucha advances another explanation – a lack of dialogue with the local people. I wonder whether he was present in Ayodhya at the time. If he were, he would have experienced the silent support

Sahmat received from local people, at great risk to their safety. For they knew that Muktnaad had made it possible for the minorities to recover their self-esteem and live with greater dignity, even after Sahmat members 'returned to their homes in New Delhi.' At any rate, there is enough about Sahmat in the essays – Mangolpuri camp and Mumbai and Bangalore events – to suggest how the organisation reached out 'to those who may have no access to the political discourse of secularism.'

Neither constructing secularism nor contesting communalism can be successful without an engagement with both the state and civil society. The Indian state, although secular in principle, has often vacillated in its commitment and succumbed to the communal imperatives. Therefore, retrieving the secular space within the state is as important as furthering secular consciousness in civil society. The relationship between the secularity of the state and the secularisation of civil society, however, is dialectical and inter-dependent. Secular action, both cultural and political, therefore calls for a dual strategy: a simultaneous struggle for expanding the secular space within both the state and civil society. Rethinking secularism and communalism has become essential in the contemporary context. Foregrounding this need itself is the beginning of a healthy debate, the necessary contours of which these books attempt to delineate.

**K.N. Panikkar**

**CHALLENGING UNTOUCHABILITY: Dalit Initiative and Experience from Karnataka** edited by Simon R. Charsley and G.K. Karanth. Sage, New Delhi, 1998.

THE category of dalit has lately acquired a certain salience in Indian politics, overturning in terms of mobilisational appeal the precursor labels of untouchable and harijan. These discontinuities in terminology mirror different moments in the evolution of community identity. Depressed classes, which was the term of reference in a more general era, could not survive the scathing riposte that all sections of the Indian population were 'depressed' on account of colonial subjugation. 'Untouchable' was coined as a brutal description of a brutal reality, and later came to be assimilated by the victim populations as an ironic comment on the irrationality of the social structure they lived within.

The epic clash between Gandhi and Ambedkar created the conditions for an integration of these sec-

tions into the structures of governance through the new category of 'scheduled castes'. This remains a category that is purely administrative in its purposes and connotations. In terms of inclusion of diverse social groups, it has remained frozen in time for much longer than the underlying political realities seem to warrant. But efforts to recategorise are invariably met with a storm of protests. The SC category has, like much else, become part of the embedded equilibrium between political pressure groups.

Briefly, these aspects of the overarching political reality set the context for Charsley and Karanth to organise this set of essays. Authored by social scientists working in Karnataka, these essays delve deep into various aspects of social organisation in seven distinct villages of Karnataka. The participants' observation method chosen is consistent with the authors' conviction that deeper understanding requires an unraveling of the layers of articulation of dalit politics, starting from their local forms of expression in the endogamous caste grouping or *jati*.

Identities in nomenclature, the authors find, need not necessarily point to identities in social and political interests. Sections of the dalit population have assimilated cultural resources in diverse ways in their struggle against inherited disabilities. Some have renounced traditional *jati* nomenclature in favour of an appellation that proclaims a primeval claim to habitation of the land – such as *Adi Karanataka* or *Adi Dravida*. Others have taken on the culturally neutral but politically assertive dalit label, and still others the scheduled caste label of bureaucratic impersonality and administrative neutrality. While these emphasise in various ways an element of dissent and separation from the wider cultural milieu, there are dalit sections which have chosen the path of integration, typically through retaining their *jati* appellations while rationalising their social status through some myth of origin.

In this volume Charsley and Karanth seek to portray the diversity of the forms of combat that the victims of unequal societies adopt to rid themselves of inherited disabilities. Avenues of economic advancement are limited and precarious in terms of their rewards, though perhaps abundant in terms of risks. Electoral politics has tended in places to produce a new understanding of convenience between the untouchable sections and traditionally dominant groups. And quite in contrast to the picture of unrelenting oppression that the dalit movement in national politics has often sought recourse to, local realities often provide rich instances of ritual participation and assimilation.

The cultural resources deployed by the dalit movement are different. Though primeval claims and the effort to restore a sense of continuity with historical deprivation (whether real or constructed) are important, the emphasis of the largely urban-based dalit movement is on modernisation and the application of technological resources in political struggle. Though the dalit movement does strike up powerful resonances in the countryside, some of its modes of expression have perhaps been less than successful in bridging the urban-rural gap.

The dialectic of local and national factors is one of the main concerns of this set of essays. The seven specific field studies provide the basis for a number of generalisations about how national politics has impinged on the struggle against caste debilities, how certain rigidities of perception and policy have reduced a situation of local complexity to one of artificial homogeneity.

Charsley and Karanth have grappled with a complex reality without seeking excessive recourse to any simplificatory device. This book is the outcome of a collaborative venture between two institutions, the Department of Sociology in the University of Glasgow and the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. It is a book that reflects, virtually on every page, the looming presence of the doyen of Indian sociological research, M. N. Srinivas. It is essential reading for an appreciation of current social realities, especially for those who believe that politics in the next few years will be dominated by the re-entry into historical processes of traditionally disadvantaged and oppressed groups.

**Sukumar Muralidharan**

**DALITS IN INDIA: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special Reference to Christians** by James Massey. Manohar, New Delhi, 1995.

**DALITS AND CHRISTIANITY: Subaltern Religions and Liberation Theology in India** by Sathianathan Clark. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

FOR long it had been conventional and to an extent tautological to link Christianity with dalit liberation. However, in recent years there has been much caste-based tension among the Christians. In fact, the multiple contradictions and submerged conflicts among the dalit

Christians are now spilling over in a *manthan*. This leads to several questions such as: Has Christianity actually been a liberative force and has it fulfilled the dalit aspiration for a new identity in society? If not, then how do we understand and respond to the growing challenge? These questions articulate the need for a clear understanding of the dalit Christian experience along with a more constructive and inclusive response. The two books under review makes significant contributions in this direction.

James Massey, through his historical analysis, points out that dalit Christian experience, in its surge for justice, has been one of continuing let downs and reactions. Today the dalit Christians are experiencing multiple discrimination. So deeply rooted are the caste prejudices in Indian society that the Church, despite its proclaimed break with Hinduism and the caste system, is not devoid of caste discrimination. Within the Church set up caste identity overrides religious identities.

While the 'untouchables' approached the missionaries in the hope of finding equality and a new identity, they continued to be treated as untouchables because earlier converts had already occupied all the positions in the caste hierarchy, leaving none vacant for the neo-Christian. As a result, the Church even failed to provide the dalits full advantage of its educational facilities. The opportunities made available by them disproportionately benefited upper caste converts while the dalits got further marginalised.

At the community level the dalits continue to be treated as inferior because of their birth. For example, in predominately Christian villages, the dalit colony is distinct and separate from the upper caste settlement. The economic conditions are also deplorable. Data on educational mobility and occupational advancement of Protestants in Madras reveal that the dalits lag far behind. In Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka the dalit economic position, despite their conversion, has not improved. In Kerala the dalit Christians are mainly landless labourers. There is no question of inter-dining or inter-marriage between the dalits and the Syrian Christians.

While, the state that declares itself secular, does not extend the schedule caste privileges to them on a purely religious basis, i.e., because they are Christians, similarly, no political party has taken up the reservation issue seriously. The Hindutva forces, instead of addressing the problems of the dalits, are propagating the idea of re-conversion, as if that would in any way improve the position of the dalits. The other political

parties too calculate the political advantage or disadvantage in extending reservation to dalit Christians. Massey concludes the book by pointing out that the state should extend reservation to the dalit Christians too. After all a dalit is a dalit irrespective of his/her religion.

While one agrees with James Massey's understanding of the Indian state and its responsibility, the question remains whether the extension of reservation would be enough to face the challenge of dalit identity. Undoubtedly, the emerging politics of 'fragmentation and dissension' that one is witnessing among the dalit Christians is but a reflection and consequence of the unreconciled social differences and deep cultural divides still endemic to our society. But even more, it is a search for a new identity. Moreover, does economic aggrandizement necessarily mean social and cultural empowerment too? In other words, one needs to go beyond the politics of reservation into the realm of the existing power structure.

Moreover, whether religion is change-promoting or change-inhibiting, its effectivity in social action is largely determined by its social location, its relation to other institutions in society and its internal structure. In this context, James Massey needs to relate the content of religion more closely to the context.

It is here that Sathianathan Clarke's book becomes important. To tackle and confront the issue of dalit identity, two different approaches can be adopted. One is to function within the existing parameters of the power structure and to mould them in favour of the oppressed. Another is to question the parameters themselves, seek out their roots, subject them to scrutiny and discard them in favour of others favouring the oppressed. Sathianathan Clark seems to have opted for the first approach.

Clark makes an analysis of Christian theology as the source of power and patronage to the dalits. Indian theology, contrary to its proclaimed aim of being inclusive, has been exclusionary and hegemonic in nature. It has been at once fragmented and monolithic, riven by multiple divisions yet providing no real pluralism, with no vibrant democratic process in its organizational framework. In sharp contrast to the monolithic set up of the Church there are multiple human experience competing with each other. However, by treating human experience as an ever-present universal intrinsic to every kind of human activity, the church has devalued the multiple human experience of different collectives.

By the valorisation of particular collectives of human beings it has only created a homogenised culture. In this entire exercise the experience of dalit religion has got marginalised and subordinated. As a result, theology in place of being a critical construction has become elitist – reinforcing the construals of the dominant discourse – producing a discourse of the caste converts.

In theory, Christian tradition is local, plural, dynamic and there is really no common or unitary manner in which it operates in the life of the community. Consequently, there is significant difference in the manner the caste and dalit Christian traditions have evolved. While the educated and literate caste Christians may evolve traditions based on the written scriptures, the uneducated and illiterate dalit Christians have been handed down traditions based more on oral versions of scriptural stories. Which are local, plural and dynamic.

Though dalits account for a major proportion of Christians in India, Indian theology has largely ignored the factuality and fecundity of their socio-historical reality. The caste converts constructed their theology by taking into account their particular heritage, i.e., caste Hindu tradition, and largely ignored that of the dalit converts. As a process it has become hegemonic in character.

To capture the dialogical, inclusive and liberative dimensions of theology there is an urgent need to identify the nature and function of oral scriptures in the life of the dalit Christians and the ways in which it is both dependent on and free from the written scripture. The religious world of the dalits must be recollected and remembered. This would not only make Indian theology more liberative but also help it in countering the sanskritizing tendencies inherent in it.

In this context, the recollection and reconstruction of the history and cultural traditions of the Paraiyar community of Tamil Nadu could help in understanding the resistive and dynamic nature of the dalits. First, the Paraiyar claim to be the original inhabitants of the land. Second, they are a culturally distinct community with the drum as a key symbol of this particularity. And third, they are an economically oppressed and religiously and culturally marginalised community, mainly because their distinctive heritage is not in conformity with the traditions of the caste Hindu community.

The Paraiyar religion is explicated through a creative interpretation of goddess Ellaiyamma and the drum. Ellaiyamman symbolizes the distinctiveness



and particularity of the Paraiyar religion in its resistance against the invading the co-opting tendencies of caste Hindus. Moreover, the drum provides an important key to understanding the particularity of the religion of the Paraiyar.

A close analysis of their religious traditions brings to the fore that subaltern religions are not mere 'false consciousness' that are manufactured by the vested interest of the dominant classes. On the contrary they are the locus for the reconfiguration of subaltern subjectivity. Based on the indepth analysis of the history and traditions of the Paraiyar's, Clark creates a provisional dalit Christology with the hope that it would make Christian theology truly liberative.

Undoubtedly, Clark has been able to touch the nerve centre of the problems associated with dalit Christians. But the question is who bells the cat? How will the process begin and what would be the role of dalits in initiating this process of change, specially in the given context of unequal power relations? These are some of the questions which needs to be answered in order to translate theory into practice.

Arundhuti Roy Choudhury

**QUEST FOR POWER: Oppositional Movements and Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh** by Zoya Hasan. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

IN no other state has the decline of the Congress party been so dramatic as in Uttar Pradesh. Even though this was evident since 1967 when the *Jat* (peasant) leader Charan Singh parted ways from the Congress to float his own outfit, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD), the past decade has finally drawn the curtain on Congress dominance.

Ironically, U.P., which was the heartland not only of cultural nationalism but also of the Congress party, proved to be the watershed for Congress politics. This was not entirely surprising since the state has been a progenitor of most changes that have subsequently overtaken Indian politics in the post-independence period. The peasantisation, the dalitisation and backwardisation, and now Hindutva – all originated and flourished largely in Uttar Pradesh.

The book under review draws our attention to the rise of the movements which eventually occupied the space created by the decline of the Congress party in the state. The author of the book, Zoya Hasan, has termed these developments as oppositional movements which became increasingly relevant and in fact

accounted for post-Congress politics in U.P. The net consequence was the 'exit of the centrist agenda from the political imagination and the invention of exclusivist mobilisation and sectional social coalitions as vehicles for capturing political power' (p. 60). This culminated in class, caste and communal polarisations.

The first major political development was an assertion by the surplus producing farmers, particularly in the western districts of the state. The land reform legislation which followed the Zamindari Abolition Act never really succeeded. Consequently, few landlords in U.P. lost any significant amount of land. 'Basically, land reforms were effective in eliminating the old system of tax farming and in creating a new hierarchy of peasant proprietors in place of landlords and tenants' (p. 74). It was this class of medium and large landholding farmers who eventually made use of the Green Revolution package and emerged powerful enough to challenge the dominance of the Congress party. The disenchantment of this class from Congress politics was largely responsible for the weakening of the Congress hold on state politics.

The rise of peasant power in U.P. was largely confined to the western districts in view of the land distribution pattern there. Since the Jats who constituted the bulk of these farmers were technically outside the fold of the 'backward classes' (even though they were not the twice-born), their struggle against the Congress politics could not capitalise on the political momentum generated by the backward caste politics in east U.P. The socialists always had an important stake in the mobilisations in these areas. When the backward castes emerged as a major challenge to the Congress politics in some of the north Indian states in the post-Mandal era, the Jat farmers of west U.P. could not but join the anti-Mandal agitation.

It was left to the BJP's Hindutva politics to 'unite' the peasant and backward caste assertions against the Congress by attempting the 'homogenisation' of the entire 'Hindu community', seemingly bypassing the caste and class divisions in Hindu society. The success of the Hindutva project lay in 'cementing' the electorate to enable the BJP to cut into the support bases of the 'encroachers' in the space created by the withdrawal of the Congress umbrella.

Ironically, BJP politics has been most successful in a state which was not traditionally the party bastion, and unlike Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh or Rajasthan where for decades the BJP was placed second after the Congress, it was not the main opposition party in U.P. This position was held by the BKD or later

by the Lok Dal and the Bharatiya Lok Dal. As late as 1984, the BJP had no representation from the state in the Lok Sabha; it had only eight MPs in 1989. The rise of the BJP is therefore dramatic only after 1991 when U.P. became a major contributor to the party's tally in the Lok Sabha. It was precisely for this reason that Hindutva politics became crucial for the BJP in a state like U.P. where in the absence of a party network (*a la* Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh), it would have taken decades to build a party organisation from the grass-root. Hindutva politics helped in short-circuiting this otherwise long drawn process, for which the BJP was obviously not prepared to wait.

While Zoya Hasan has done well by way of drawing on the various developments in post-independence politics and analysing the various possible interconnections, the book somehow lacks the rigour of a researcher who dwells on primary data. It seems that she has largely relied on newspaper reports and comments for her crucial conclusions. While newspapers and news magazines can be a source of primary information, any reliance on them for views (in contrast to hard news) and analytical comments is not entirely free of intellectual risks. Most newspapers have their own agenda and are well-known for their politico-academic biases.

Excessive reliance on the 'English press' is particularly hazardous in understanding the politics of a state where, in the author's own analysis, a 'Hindi only' policy has been adopted for years, and the English press more marginalised than in any other state of India. Interestingly, the two most powerful (in terms of sheer reach and circulation) chains of Hindi newspapers, *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagran*, have been referred to only to censure them as being part of a communal campaign against the Muslims during the course of Ayodhya mobilisation episode. While the bias of these newspapers was well known, they were far more balanced after the Babri Masjid demolition and refrained from indulging in the frenzy that they had provoked during the *kar sewa* episode in 1990. The author could have referred to them at least on the issues of casteisation and peasantisation of politics.

The metropolitan academia seems to have so completely internalised the anti-Hindi and anti-small town bias that it relies excessively on what is available in the English magazines and press, as if the latter is free of any bias. Consequently, 'U.P. bashing' is indulged in out of sheer internalisation of this bias. Thus, while regional languages were being promoted (rightly or wrongly) in many north Indian states, the

policy of the Congress to push Hindi in U.P. came to be viewed as something which produced half-literates termed 'Hindi-literati'. The author approvingly quotes a study that maintains: 'The social and intellectual world of the Hindi speaking intellectual continues to be very narrow and their general culture is quite parochial' (p. 187).

The author's identification of Urdu with the idiom of pluralism and that of Hindi with somewhat narrow nationalism is not quite balanced. Similarly her assertion that 'the Hindi-Urdu differentiation made Hindi a potent instrument for the politics of religious and cultural separatism' (p. 189, emphasis added) ignores the ground reality that this was not entirely due to the 'Hindi only' policy of the U.P. Congress but had as much to do with the anti-English attitude of the rising OBC and even upper caste elite which was keen to dislodge the urban English elite from positions of power. She does grudgingly concede this point (p. 178) but somehow equates this with an anti-Muslim bias. Any replacement of English by Hindi at the level of higher education would have necessarily meant distancing of the language from the spoken Hindustani which had characterised the common heritage of the state. Even today the *lingua franca* (as against the official or written language) continues to be a mix of Hindi-Urdu, call it Hindustani, Hindi, Urdu or by any other name.

Unfortunately, for various reasons a beautiful language like Urdu came to be associated with Muslim communalism, but it was not as if only the Hindi enthusiasts were harping on a Sanskritisation of their language. It may be noted that even in a prosperous (and therefore 'progressive') state like Punjab, where the Congress was never dominated by upper caste Hindus, the regional language (Punjabi) was promoted with a vengeance, and that too after it had been completely dePersianised and Sanskritised.

While the reviewer has his own perspective on U.P. politics and does not intend to impose it on the author, it is crucial not to be swayed by grand ideologies which more often than not block the vision of a researcher. Though Mulayam Singh Yadav did check the growth of Hindutva politics in U.P., would it be intellectually fair to equate his efforts with secularism and pluralism, as the author, like some left intellectuals, seems to have done?

The book is over-descriptive in detailing the rather well known developments like the rise of the OBCs, the peasants and the Hindutva politics in U.P. and follows a perspective generally held by the metropolitan elite.

The author is right in maintaining that U.P. suffers from a lack of regional identity which has denied it the benefit of a regional elite who could represent the state. This is perhaps even more true of intellectuals who can sympathetically analyse the state's politics without dismissing every development as an outcome of a retrogressive small town mentality of a parochial Hindi elite.

Surprisingly, even an OUP publication is not quite free of printing errors. Mainpuri is printed as 'Manipuri' (p. 40); the OBC combine is reported to have increased its 'vote share' from 42 to 176 (p. 160); the demands of Urdu supporters 'recieved' some attention from the Central government (p. 184); and the Congress was not inclined to stem the rot which had 'set in the from the 1970s' (p. 192); and finally, a sentence in a footnote (p. 117) reads '...*anyone* who owned land preferred to get *their* crops cultivated through share croppers rather than cultivate *themselves*.' (emphasis mine).

Nevertheless, the book is useful for those keen to acquaint themselves with the major developments in post-independence U.P. politics. The book adequately deals with not merely post-Congress politics (as the title indicates), but even the period of Congress dominance.

**Pradeep Kumar**

**THE FLAMING FEET: A Study of the Dalit Movement** by D.R. Nagaraj. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993.\*

WITH Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party's somewhat spectacular performance in the recently concluded Assembly elections, attention has once again focused on the status and movements of dalits in the country. Be it Professor M.S. Gore's *The Social Context of an Ideology*; Gail Omvedt's *Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*; or even Koenraad Elst's tract for the Hindutva brigade, *Indigenous Indians: Agastya to Ambedkar*—the last year has seen at least a dozen offerings seeking to explore the implications of the graded inequality built into our caste system—existentially, historically and ideologically. Rich as many of these efforts are, they rarely come close to displaying the 'captivating power' exemplified in the creative writing classified as dalit literature.

\* D.R. Nagaraj recently passed away at the young age of 44. *The Flaming Feet* is the only book he wrote in English. This review was first published in *The Book Review* in May 1994.

Approaching as they do the subject of their concern from the vantage point of the outsider, they fail to break through the cultural barrier encoded in the self-expression of the victims. Even Tendulkar's plays or Bhairappa's 'Ullanghan'—rich as they are in exploring the contradictory impulses of the dalit psyche, remain in the end, voices of the disengaged outsider.

It cannot be denied that even those sympathetic to dalit urges for cultural and political self-expression, have been more than a little dismayed at the sorry state of dalit politics, particularly in this century. Be it the various expressions of the non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka; Ambedkar's attempts at floating a political party or leading his community outside the fold of Hinduism; the numerous factions of the Republican Party or the Dalit Panthers and their fractious wrangling; even Kanshi Ram and his BSP—the era of a cohesive, militant and socially inclusive dalit politics still seems a distant cry. It appears too consumed by rage, a self-destructive hate, even a leadership willing to be suborned by mainstream, upper caste politics. All we need is to observe the political trajectory of mainstream dalit leaders—from Babu Jagjivan Ram to Ram Vilas Paswan.

Central to the dilemma of dalit politics are the spaces occupied by Gandhi and Ambedkar, undoubtedly the major influences on dalit consciousness in the 20th century. D.R. Nagaraj's little booklet, a collection of six essays, is one of the more creative attempts by a self-confessed fellow-traveler of the dalit movement to explore different facets of the Gandhi-Ambedkar relationship in terms of the legacy it leaves behind.

Most observers have tended to look at Gandhi and Ambedkar as polar opposites, with the former, given his unique position in our freedom struggle, not just winning out in the Poona Pact but indelibly marking the future of dalit politics in a framework of incorporation and compromise. Little wonder that contemporary dalit militancy is marked by a rejection of Gandhi.

Somewhat differently, Nagaraj argues that Ambedkar, while troubled by Gandhi's framework and views, was transformed by him. So incidentally was Gandhi himself, a fact rarely recognised. One grid on which their differences can be located rests on an understanding of 'self-purification vs self-respect.' Nagaraj sees Gandhi as located primarily within the former stream—of completely rejecting untouchability as evil while holding onto the caste system and *varnashrama dharma* as a non-negotiable part of his legacy. His was a quest of combining an earlier

tradition of the indigenous radicals who stressed spiritual requirements with the political/cultural requirements of combating colonialism. Gandhi clearly saw that confronting social injustice via withdrawal and creating one's own cult, a process symptomatic of many religious reformers, was insufficient in a situation where the inner resources of Hindu tradition were deformed by the colonial encounter. For him the task was one of transcending/annihilation of the caste-ego.

In contrast, the non-Brahmin movement's response to the caste system was secular and materialist, using a mix of organisational strength and constitutional methods to promote upward social mobility among the dalits. Unfortunately this strategy only led to the creation of an incorporated elite, cut-off from their less fortunate brethren. It led to what Nagaraj calls 'willful amnesia' towards their own past. Further, it fostered a cultural inertia, a lack of appreciation of the religious-cultural quest for identity. Ambedkar was critical of this tendency in the dalit movement while simultaneously rejecting Gandhi's insistence that dalits remain within the Hindu religious and cultural fold: a classic disjunction between the positions of a 'troubled insider' and a 'struggling victim'.

Nagaraj explores the contradictions in both views by looking at the temple-entry movement. At one level there was the irreconcilability between the Gandhian/Vaishnavite veneration of the temple and the anti-temple stand of radical spiritualists, including Tagore. On the other was the dalit dilemma that in supporting a temple-entry movement it simultaneously extended support to the very symbolic structure it was fighting. Was this why Ambedkar's Mahad struggle for the untouchable's access to public water in 1927 was more successful, for it could more easily be posed as a civil rights issue?

The same kind of problem is evident in the conceptualisation of the village—for Gandhi the basis of building a non-western republican India; for Ambedkar the cesspool of Indian civilization. Gandhi, while prescient in his critique of modern western civilization with its urban-industrial bias, never quite understood that for the dalits there was no possibility of justice in the village and under a panchayat. Equally, to remain in the village meant remaining tied to the same humiliating occupations that had so far been their fate.

Nagaraj is brilliant in his analyses of the collapse of restraint and the consequent recourse to violence that marks village society when it comes to handling the question of untouchables. In looking at three different

kinds of struggles around rights—structural (land, water, forests); equal space (public spaces); and cultural space (temples and religion)—Nagaraj lays out the different stances needed in the different contexts. He also points to the contradiction between the dalit demand for control of structural resources and the environmental movement which advocates community control over communitarian resources. Coming back to Gandhi and Ambedkar—the former's village was metaphorically located in an idealised past; the latter's village was one that never was. It is thus that one remained a critical traditionalist; the other a critical modernist.

It is, however, in pointing out that dalit self-confidence inevitably generates a fear in caste Hindus, thereby raising the spectre of retaliation, that Nagaraj locates a major limitation in Ambedkarite ideology and politics. Assertion by weak and dispersed communities (dalits) can and does lead to retaliatory violence by the powerful (caste Hindus)—a process that we witness every day.

The essay on cultural memory, similarly, analyses the weakness of the Gandhian position—where invoking Hindu reform, a return to the village, a restoration of dignity to dalit occupations and so on—only ends up creating a 'harijan'—a position that the movement of untouchables rightly seeks to reject. This ostensible contradiction between the demands of a bruised and battered whole (Hindu society) seeking autonomy and dignity in an unjust world (the Gandhian project), and the requirements of a subjugated and violated sub-stratum which sees its future only in standing apart (the Ambedkarite legacy), is a dilemma still waiting to be resolved.

This is beautifully captured in the remaining three essays on Kannada literature, where the differences between the radical/reformist upper caste ideologues sensitive to dalit suffering and urges viz Anantha Murthy, and a Dalit voice *à la* Devanoor Mahadeva are sought to be explored. In the end, the tension remains unresolved. But we, as readers, have in the process of accompanying Nagaraj in his explorations, been sensitized to dalit consciousness to a degree greater than before. Maybe now we will be less prone to be judgmental when confronted with the vagaries of Dalit behaviour. As Edward Said once wrote in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli encounter, 'We are the victims of the victims of a holocaust.' The dalit is the victim of the victimized Indian.

**Harsh Sethi**

**TOWARDS A NON-BRAHMIN MILLENNIUM:  
From Iyothce Thass to Periyar** by V. Geetha and  
S. V. Rajadurai. Samya, Calcutta, 1998.

Periyar E. V. Ramasamy Naicker, the high priest of the Dravidian Self-Respect movement was said to have exhorted his followers that if they came across a Brahmin and a snake at the same time, then the Brahmin should be killed and the snake spared. There is no statistical evidence to show whether the snakes in the Indian subcontinent account for more than three per cent of the Tamil population. But there is definite proof that the Brahmin constituted a 'mere 3 per cent of the Tamils.'

Civil liberties activists are unlikely to endorse Periyar's advice. S. V. Rajadurai (K. Manoharan) has been active in the movements for civil liberties and democratic rights. A well-known Tamil writer, for long involved with the radical left, Rajadurai's interests range from politics, philosophy and sociology to religion, literature and the arts. Rajadurai remains the intellectual-activist, so necessary in radical movements to educate the emotions of the 'activist' as well as to infuse feeling into the erudition of intellectuals.

V. Geetha and Rajadurai have delved deep in a much neglected area of scholarship and the intensive research towards their vision of a 'non-brahmin millennium' is a pioneering exploration presented with a passion that only admittedly sympathetic interlocutors can generate. It analyses the non-brahmin movement from its origins at the end of the 19th century to EVR's movement in the late '30s with both a vigour and viciousness missing in earlier writings on the subject. It celebrates the 'wonderfully carnivalesque denunciations of caste, brahmin priesthood and the nation', and (one might add) religion, nationalism and the Hindu.

The '3 per cent Brahmins' are identified and pilloried as the root of all evil-hegemonic tyranny, regressive social practices, suppression of rights and freedoms, repressive exclusion of the non-brahmin majority, usurpation of the leadership of the nationalist movement, revolting narcissism, inhuman selfishness, ruthless protection and pursuit of self-interest, perfidious perpetuation of entrenched authority and privilege, and every manifestation of Manu, Machiavelli and Mephistopheles and the meanest conceptions of the human race.

Of course, the Tamil Brahmin (3 per cent) is also the 'South Indian Brahmin', the 'Hindu', the 'Aryan', the 'foreign invader', the 'alien interloper' the anti-

Tamil, and the Sanskrit-propagating forerunner of the Hindi imperialists of the 'bania-North'.

At the other end of the order, dominated (during British rule) by an authoritarian patriarchy of self seeking Brahmins, were the Tamils – non-brahmins who knew no antagonisms arising out of social, heirarchical or religious distinctions. This 'land of the Tamils had once been most democratic in spirit in more sense than one.' In this ancient, highly evolved and egalitarian Tamil country with 'its hoary civilisation and culture' had descended the brahmins, who like pestilential locusts were 'alien interlopers and foreigners.'

Fürther, the 'so-called panchamas were the original inhabitants of this vast subcontinent, who had been cast out of history and relegated to the fringes of society with the historic defeat of their Buddhist faith by Aryan-brahmin invaders.' This invasion, which brought the scourge of caste and untouchability, led to the demise of the 'original Dravidian culture', a glorious and now-forgotten past 'when Tamils had lived far and wide in the subcontinent and achieved a level of culture unmatched by anything that succeeded this golden age.'

Trapped in between were the British, that splendid specimen of humanity, who were untainted by prejudices of caste, colour, creed or religion, never in the least given to any kind of divide-and-rule policy. But for this supremely secular and fair-minded master race, which was deeply moved by the subjugation of the non-brahmins but manipulated by the Brahmins, the struggles of the undercastes would have gone unaided. Little wonder that the non-brahmin movements not only preferred the hegemony of the British to that of the Brahmins, but actually pleaded and politically worked overtime for perpetuating the Raj. By the way, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was a victim of Gandhi's bania-brahmin Congress which was opposed to the British. That Netaji's own leanings were towards the Germans, the aggressive and anti-Semitic self-proclaimed Aryans, is too inconsequential a fact to be dwelt upon.

For all its flawed vision and very puncturable postulates on caste, religion, nationalism, non brahminism, and the nature, role, motivations and contribution of the British, the book is an eminently readable account of a pulsating period of the non-brahmin movement. A well-documented and original, even 'creative' enquiry, this expression of the impassioned mission of Rajadurai, undertaken along with Geetha, is refreshingly provocative. The arguments, the definitions

of identities, the analyses, the interpretations and inferences, the wealth of evidence from books, newspapers and tracts particularly in Tamil, is an attempt at a different kind of history, the history of a people who perceive themselves to have been left out because of their unbearable non-brahminness of being.

The patterns of the non-brahmin movement are traced in intimate and loving detail, suffused with the prejudices which are inseparable from such a passionate engagement. The development of a self-validating ideology, the impulses which gave rise to it and the leading players of the Self-Respect movement, all find honourable place in this volume, which can be no less useful to deconstruct and demolish the basis of a caste-free utopia built in this book.

A sequel on the degenerate politics of the Dravidian offspring of the Self-Respect movement, particularly in the last 50 years, would be of immensely greater value and instructive on why and how the self-proclaimed inheritors of Periyar's legacy have got re-brahminised and seduced into flaunting the adornments of a new religiosity. Till this is accomplished, let us not take the Buddha's name – as non-brahmins, neo-brahmins and nuclear-brahmins have increasingly been doing – in vain.

In the interim it might be a sobering thought that the origin and development of caste was not controlled by Brahmins; they were merely clever and cunning enough to grasp that they could exploit the caste system to their advantage; and this they did by making caste-based laws which conformed to their vision of society. It is in the nature of things that ruling groups, makers and guardians of the law, belong to the elite. Despite the shift in emphasis from group and community rights to the welfare, rights and freedoms of the individual, republican values and democratic rights have yet to be actualised.

Consequently, the political, socio-economic and cultural demise of one breed of Brahmins is invariably succeeded by the rule of another class, may be even caste, of Brahmins. That they are not united by caste alone but all the other attributes which entrenched caste-based domination is cold comfort while awaiting, with disillusionment, the dawn of a new millennium. Privilege and power is always sought to be protected. Whether the arguments advanced to achieve this are sacral or political, ethnic or economic, cultural or social does not in any way mitigate the condition of the individual victim.

**Shastri Ramachandaran**

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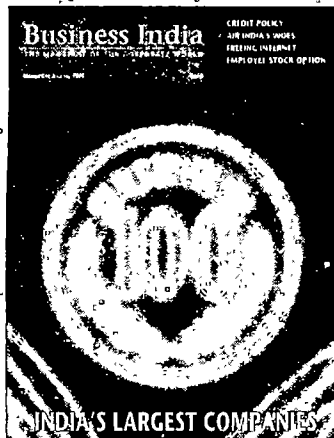
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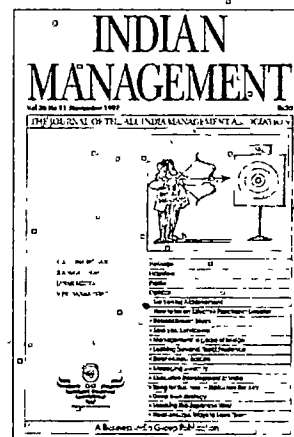
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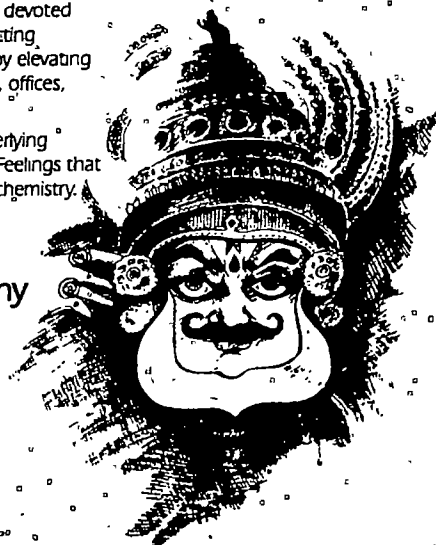
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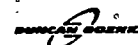


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# Backpage

IN the midst of a bleak festive season – continuing recession, dropsy deaths, and spiralling onion prices – there was finally some cause for cheer. Amartya Sen, long regarded as one of the most distinguished practitioners of the dismal science of economics, finally bagged the Nobel Prize. For years he had been a front-runner. But such is the measure of the times that the Nobel Committee preferred to recognise arcane technicians concerned more with the health of the stock market than the welfare of people.

It is indicative that Professor Sen received the news in New York where he had gone to deliver an oration in the memory of Mahbub ul Haq, the Pakistani economist best known for constructing the Human Development Index. Amartya Sen, not only foregrounded the contributions of his late colleague, he saw the award as a long overdue recognition of development economics and of those within his profession who have focused on the perennial but unfashionable problems of poverty, unemployment and distributive justice.

Not unexpectedly, the country went euphoric. We were informed that this was the sixth person from India to bag the prestigious prize. We were reminded that Amartya Sen was named by no less than our first Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, of his connections to Shantiniketan, of his quiet pride at holding an Indian passport and retaining his Bengali roots.

More intriguing were the hosannas of praise heaped on the economist by different political parties. This when much of Amartya Sen's work and public advocacy encodes a severe critique of our political class and the absence of public welfare in the policies they have espoused. The ability to appropriate and enroll in one's sectarian project is what, one suspects, marks out the malleability and resilience of the politician. Equally, it is evident, that their words of praise are hollow.

How, in particular, the BJP and the Hindutva brigade, could gush over Amartya Sen, and that too after his highly publicised attack on their Ayodhya misadventure, is astonishing. Equally one wonders what the current Congress or even the Left leadership is seeking to prove by cosying up to the economist. Sen, after all, has consistently pointed out the disastrous social implications of underfunding education and health, or to our inability to fine-tune welfarist programmes for class and gender.

As a critical modernist in the tradition of Rammohun Roy and Tagore, Sen has displayed little

patience with many of the formulations favoured by our swadeshi brigade, particularly those valourizing our Hindu past and blaming the West for all our current ills. Our enthusiastic globalisers too have been repeatedly warned that social reform and investment should predate economic reforms.

One hopes that the occasion will nudge our policy planners, as also the political masters, into more seriously re-examining the presuppositions of their favoured recipes. Even the mathematical formulation of much of Sen's work in the fields of social choice theory and welfare economics has always been firmly grounded in the social realities of developing societies. That has been his metier, and it would be a tragedy if we forget it.

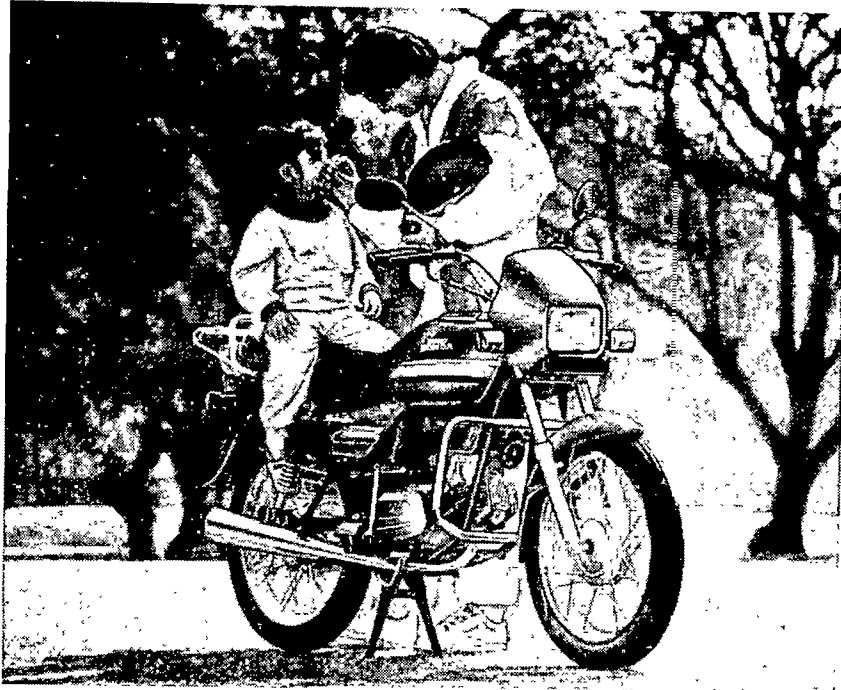
A few days before Amartya Sen's award grabbed national headlines, Professor M.L. Dantwala, who had been ailing for sometime, passed away. Few newspapers took notice, what to speak of our many TV channels. M.L. Dantwala, a founder-member of the Congress Socialist party, had long served the economics faculty at the University of Mumbai with distinction. A quiet, self-effacing man, he plugged away at the many (real) problems of Indian society. The Bombay School is marked by its abiding interaction with both the farming sector and industry. Few today who work on the problems of poverty and unemployment, rural credit and cooperatives, can ignore the invaluable contributions of Dantwala and his colleagues. He also helped establish The Indian Society of Agricultural Economics and edited its journal for over three decades, maintaining a consistency and quality rarely seen in Indian academia.

In not remembering Dantwala, the guardians of our public memory have done us a grave dis-service. Building durable institutions and intellectual traditions demands a perseverance, unfortunately in short supply. In his unswerving commitment to seeking realisable solutions to the problems of the poor, an advocacy of austerity and a healthy skepticism about recognition, Dantwala served as an exemplar of the best of our freedom struggle tradition.

We all need to facilitate Amartya Sen and his work. We also need to remember the Dantwalas. Without the latter, we cannot hope to institutionally ground the message of the former.

**Harsh Sethi**

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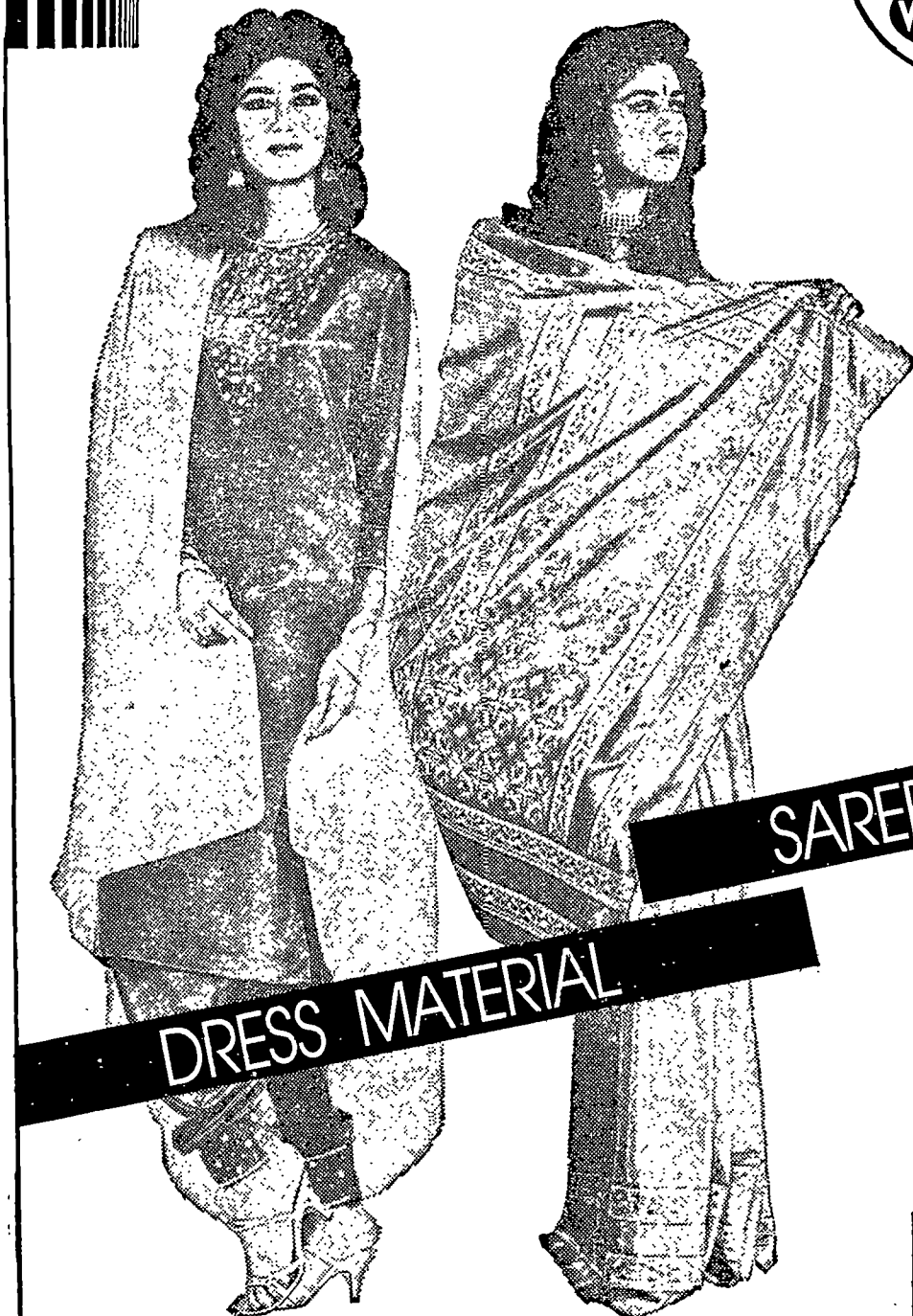


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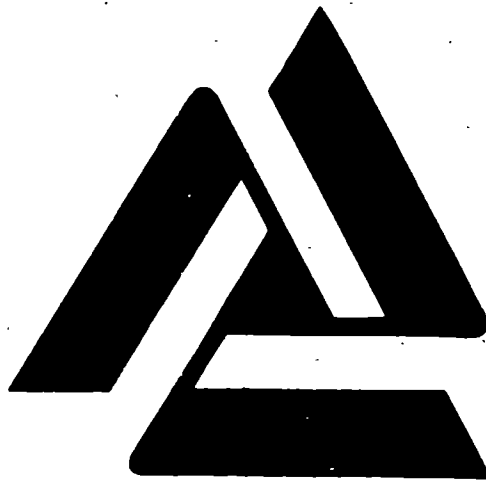
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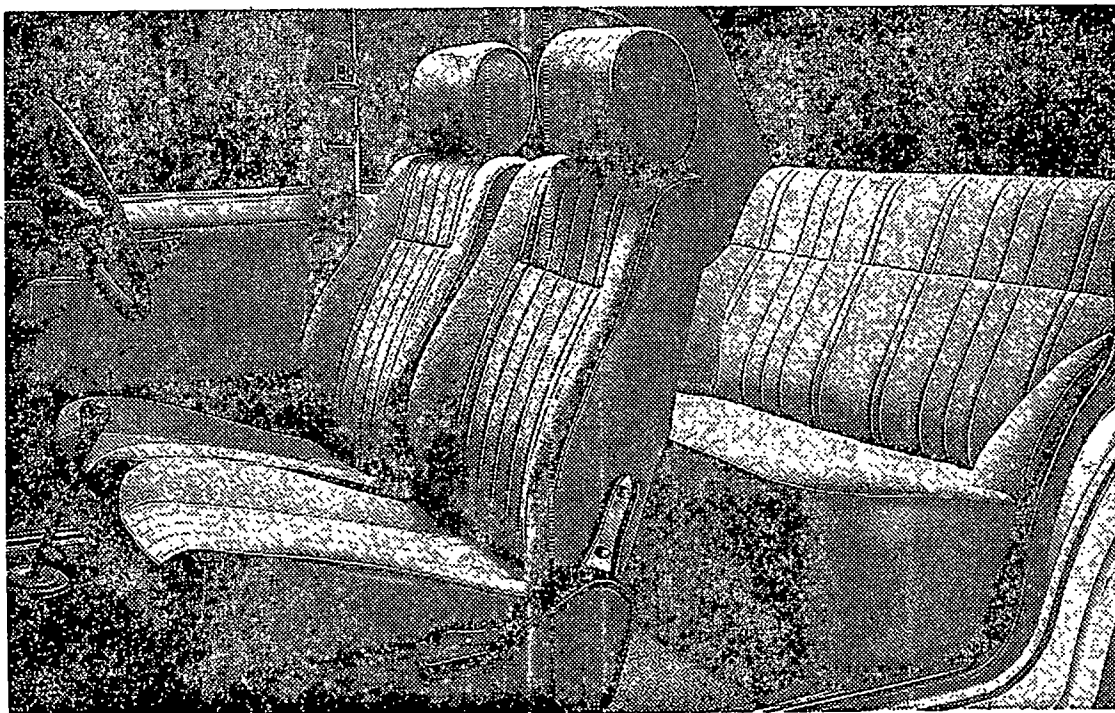


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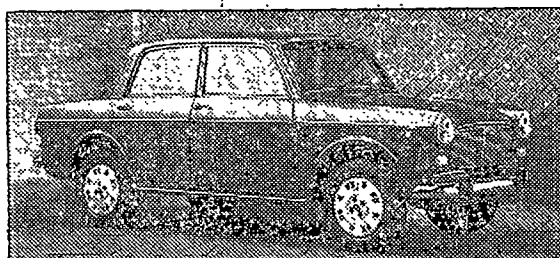
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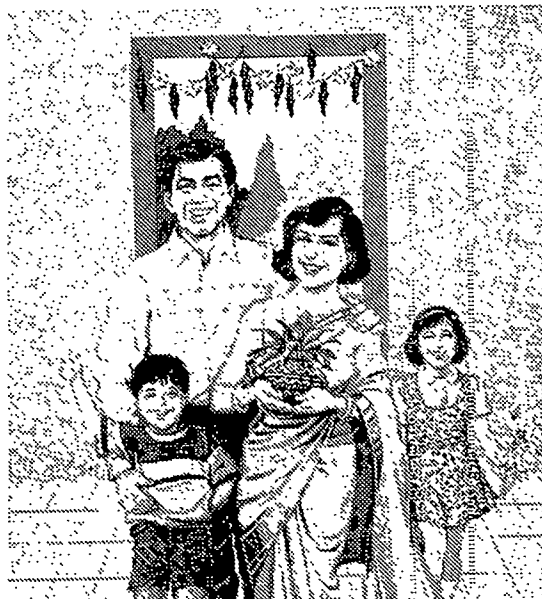
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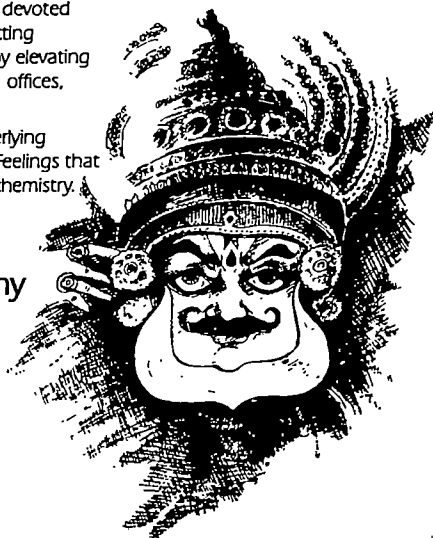
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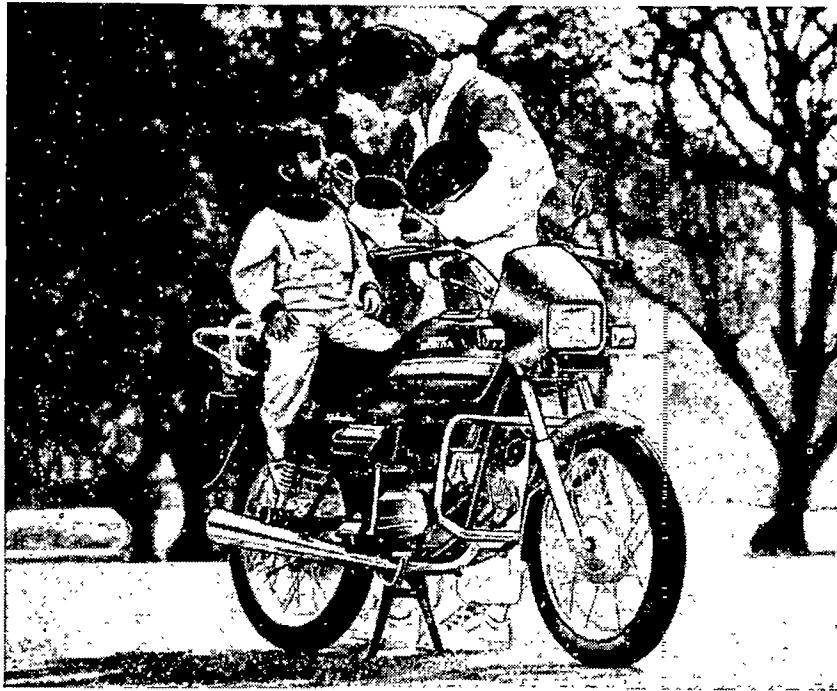
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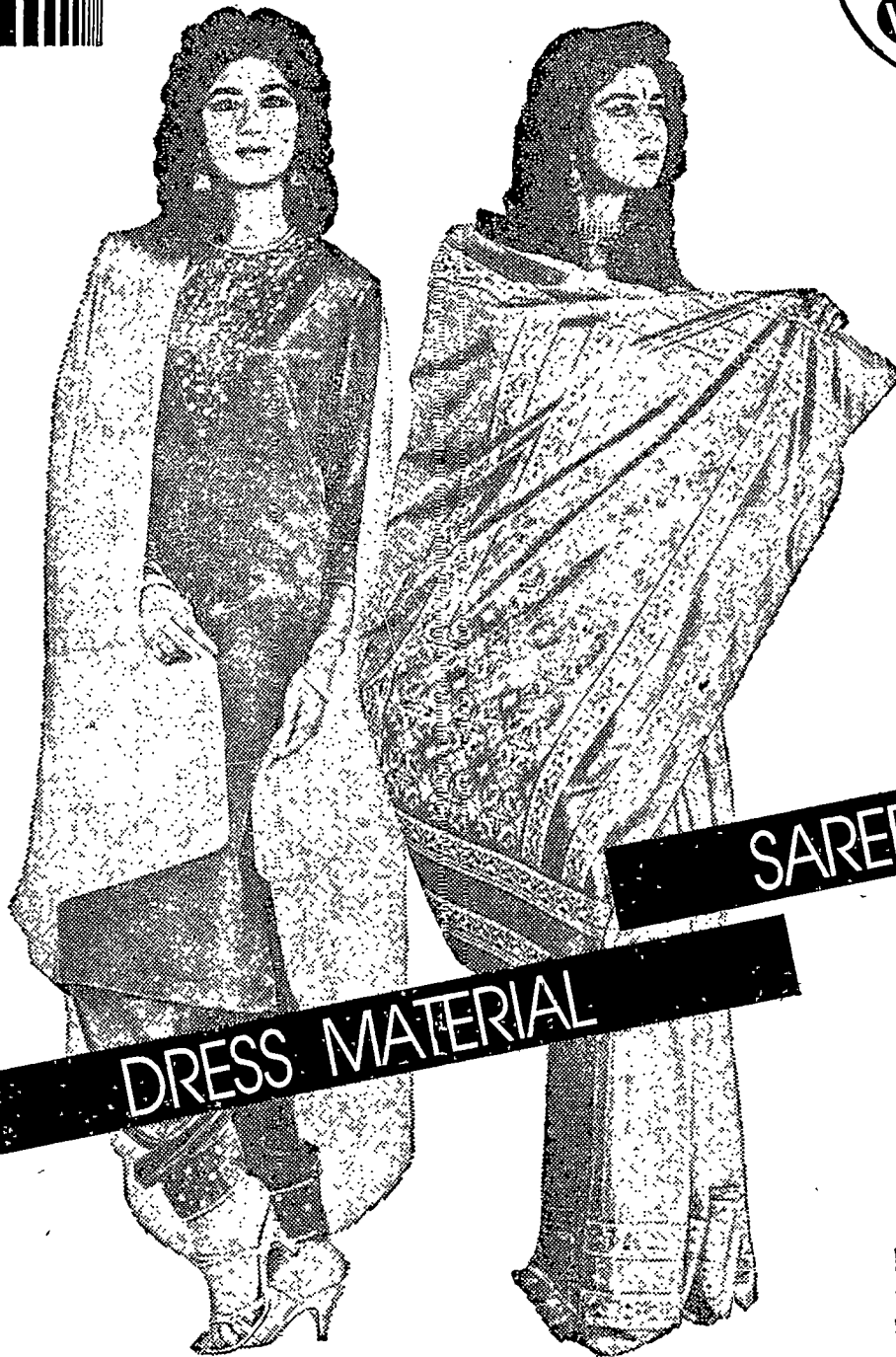
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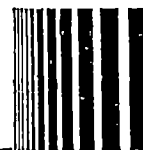
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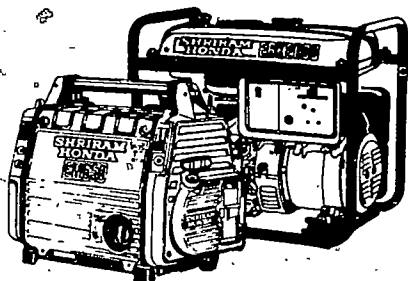
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## NEXT MONTH : INDIA 1999

# 472

## EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

a symposium on

the challenges facing

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symposium participants

- 12 **THE PROBLEM**  
Posed by J.N. Dixit, former Foreign Secretary,  
Government of India
- 21 **IN SEARCH OF A FOREIGN POLICY**  
Bhabani Sen Gupta, Centre for Studies in Global Change,  
Delhi
- 26 **POLITICS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**  
Hari Vasudevan, Department of History,  
Calcutta University, Calcutta
- 31 **A COSY RELATIONSHIP**  
Anuradha M. Chenoy, School of International Studies,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- 35 **IMPROVING INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS**  
Vinod C. Khanna, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi
- 40 **INDIA-JAPAN AND THE COMING CENTURY**  
Brij Tankha, Department of Chinese and Japanese Studies,  
Delhi University, Delhi
- 44 **RELATING TO THE OIC**  
Syed Shahabuddin, former MP and Editor,  
'Muslim India', Delhi
- 50 **NEW PATHWAYS**  
Rajen Harshe, Professor, Department of Political Science,  
University of Hyderabad
- 55 **EVOLVING CONSENSUS**  
Interview with I.K. Gujral, MP, and former Prime Minister  
of India, by Nandan Unnikrishnan, Head of Channel, TVI
- 58 **FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE**  
Satish Kumar, holds the MEA chair at the United Service  
Institute, Delhi; former Professor of Diplomacy,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- 62 **RETHINKING THE FUNDAMENTALS**  
Shankar K. Bajpai, IFS, former Ambassador to Pakistan,  
China and the USA; and Secretary MEA
- 66 **BOOKS**  
Reviewed by Kamal M. Chenoy, Ajoy Bose,  
Usha Ramanathan, T. Nirmala Devi, Rita Manchanda,  
and Kanti Bajpai
- 79 **FURTHER READING**  
Compiled by Mallika Joseph A., Institute of Peace and  
Conflict Studies, Delhi
- 85 **COMMENT**  
Received from Fumiko Amano, a survivor of Hiroshima
- 86 **COMMUNICATION**  
Received from V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, Chennai
- 88 **BACKPAGE**  
**COVER**  
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ON the completion of 50 years as an independent country, India faces a transformed world. The terms of reference of India's interaction with the international community stand profoundly changed. Great power ideological confrontation has come to an end. National sovereignty and national insularities are being subsumed by the process of economic globalisation. The information technology revolution is progressively reducing the relevance of international frontiers between nation states. The strategic equations and the chemistry of power which underpinned international relations for half a century since the end of World War II have been replaced by new equations.

India and many developing countries have lost the leverages which they exercised in foreign policy and strategic matters over the last 50 years because of the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the centripetal qualities characterising the relations between the five great powers, the permanent members of the Security Council. It is in this context that one tries to perceive the challenges to India's foreign policy into the first decades of the 21st century.

International relations, like general processes of history, defy attempts to force their flow into predetermined theoretical patterns or preconceived logical grooves. Prognoses in foreign policy cannot be strait-jacketed in *a priori* generalisations. When discussing the future of international relations or challenges to our foreign policy, we are dealing with the complexity of

human emotions, the involutions of human motivations and the ambiguities and uncertainties of the political and socio-economic impulses which underpin them. Foreign policy's eternal challenge is to deal with the unpredictability of inter-state and inter-societal relations. International relations will remain involuted, subject to wayward human behaviour. They are baroque, in a manner of speaking.

It is with a profound awareness of this limitation that I undertake the speculative exercise about the tasks facing India's foreign policy in the 21st century and the challenges that we would face.

At the most fundamental level, the challenge that India as well as other members of the international community face is to resolve a basic contradiction affecting the prospects of human survival. This contradiction is best expressed in the debate between philosophers and socio-economic theoreticians about the perfectibility of human beings. Such a debate and its repercussions marked the end of the 18th century. On the one hand was Thomas Robert Malthus, who posited that growth of populations is indefinitely greater than the capacity of the earth to produce sufficient subsistence for human beings – that while population increases by geometrical progression, productive capacities increase only in arithmetical progression. Social upheaval and instability, therefore, are the predetermined future predicament of mankind.

## The problem



As opposed to this theory, scholars such as Antoine Condorcet and William Godwin argued that the growth of human understanding, the increase in capacity for self-improvement, and the breakthroughs in technologies and knowledge would one day lead to a more equitable world where people would live free from crime, disease, war and want. Developments over the last 200 years have proved Malthus' analysis of the population to productivity ratio right but his dire prophecies to be wrong. At the same time, while the Godwin and Condorcet prognosis has proved to be right, their questioning of Malthus' theory about imbalance between population growth and productivity has proven to be wrong. Populations have increased in geometrical progression while productivity has been increasing at lower rates. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the human capacity for self-improvement and unexpected breakthroughs in knowledge and technology have made the world a progressively more equitable and comfortable place to live in.

As the future inevitably originates in the impulses of the past, it would be pertinent to confirm the preceding positive assessment through some specifics. Trends since the middle of the 19th century till now, when we are on the threshold of the 21st century, clearly indicate that the world is more egalitarian. The information technology revolution and the consequent increasingly expeditious access to information, combined with the emergence of user-friendly technolo-

gies, has resulted in the increasing empowerment of individuals.

The levers of power are increasingly in the hands of average human beings all over the world, compared to the earlier monopoly of oligarchies or plutocratic elites in different societies and states. Political colonialism has disappeared; so has slavery. There is universally a greater shared concern about human rights. There is also an increasing awareness that the world's natural resources should be exploited and utilised in a more equitable manner while, at the same time, being subject to the imperatives of ecological balance and environmental protection. Discrimination based on ethnicity, language and race, which characterised the attitudes and policies of different states and societies, depending on their military and technological strengths, are now subject to the moral pressure of international public opinion and the political and legal pressures of the norms of international law.

The power structure of nation states is going through a metamorphosis. Nation states, as they evolved since the Treaties of Westphalia, signed in 1648, are now subject to the pressures generated by the economic and technological globalisation of the world. Their relevance in the conventional sense of the term (nation state) and their claim to unqualified sovereignty are now in question. Socio-economic interdependence between different countries, the democratisation of international politics, the disappearance of the Cold

War antagonism and the incapacity of national boundaries to compartmentalise the flow of ideas and information have resulted in the requirement of nation states to redefine their respective identities.

There are also certain strands of emerging conventional wisdom in international politics, the logic and validity of which must be examined when determining the problems and challenges that India would face in fashioning its foreign policy and structuring its external relations. The first of such strands is the proposition that the world has become unipolar and that there is likely to be 'Pax Americana' for the next 100 years or so. One does not question the fact that the United States will be the most dominant factor in world politics for quite some time to come, but in terms of technological capacities, access and control of natural resources, population strengths and economic determinants of investment opportunities and markets, the world is bound to be multipolar with other power centres being Western Europe, the Russian Federation, China, Japan, India and some strong regional arrangements if they were to emerge in South America and Africa.

A major task for India would be to nurture its economic and technological capacities and to increase its political stability and military capability to levels where it can elevate itself to a position of strength to network an equilibrium with the new power centres of the emerging multi-polar world. There are indications that an atmosphere and an opportunity for such networking now exist.

Then there is the theory about the world facing confrontation based on religious and civilisational identities of different societies. I am referring to the Samuel Huntington thesis about the clash of civilisations; a fashionable reference point today to speculate on the future of inter-state relations. This theory is of particular relevance to India because Huntington visualises our country being in a state of isolation because it is neither Islamic nor Christian. He visualises an India without allies or natural external political support systems. His theory is of intriguing interest because while he talks about India's potential isolation, he prognosticates that there would be a collusion between Confucian and Islamic civilisations, against the Western, Christian and Judaic civilisations.

One has to deeply ruminate on the predicaments envisaged by Huntington. Though one disagrees both in fundamentals and in detail with Huntington's theory about the clash of civilisations, one would agree that he has contrived and presented a challenging frame-

work to evaluate some of the emerging realities of global politics into the 21st century. He has certainly succeeded in being provocative and, to that extent, his book has some relevance. Looking at the statistical tables and the political interpretations of Huntington's thesis, one gets the impression that the provocation for this work perhaps originated during or immediately after the 1991 Gulf War in which the United States' military assertiveness against Iraq was perceived as a religious confrontation by segments of US academia.

The reason for my lengthy and critical evaluation of the Huntington thesis is that inherent in it is one of the overarching and fundamental challenges that India's foreign policy will face in the coming century. While the thesis is definitionally flawed and based on *a priori* confrontationist motivations, it brings out in relief the fact that India, the South East Asian countries (such as Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), China and Japan are not part of the broad religio-cultural categories which may dominate the power equations. India particularly, because of its plurality and being a composite of practically all the major religions and cultural groups of the world, does not easily fit into the Christian-Judaic or the Islamic camp.

Indian foreign policy, therefore, would have to facilitate our country's integration with one of the camps visualised by Huntington, if his thesis is correct. This will not be easy because the Hindu majority in India is a very India-specific phenomenon. The 120 million Muslims in India, whose numbers may increase to 250 or 300 million in the next century, would generate pressures for developing equations with the Islamic world. The other religio-ethnic identities of India may generate contradictory pressures towards the other camp. The prospect to be alert about, and to be consistently monitored, is that such pressures are not generated. The concretisation of this prospect occurred in the break-up of Yugoslavia on ethnic and religious lines. The break-up of the Soviet Union was the result of other impulses, but the phenomenon of ethno religious separation afflicting the Russian Federation and Georgia provide warning signs to be taken note of by India.

Another dimension to this challenge is that, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the sanctity of maintaining state structures of plural societies, characterised by diversity, stands eroded. If such societies do not have the inner discipline, the required levels of justice, and if they do not have the defence capacities to sustain themselves, the other power centres of the world would not be supportive of

their unity and integrity. In fact, a disintegration of such state structures could be perceived as making the world a more manageable place by the more powerful, more cohesive and economically advanced countries in the international community. India's foreign, political, economic and national security policies should be pre-emptively responsive to this challenge.

Before turning to the specific tasks on which Indian foreign policy should focus, it would be pertinent to analyse broad trends which would characterise international relations in the coming decades and the motivations of the important powers of the world which would underpin them.

Emerging trends make it obvious that international relations would be dominated by the industrially and technologically advanced countries led by the United States well into the 21st century. The first objective of these countries would be to create an international political system in which states and civil societies would be structured on the basis of political and economic terms of reference acceptable to the US and those world powers which would be responsive to their interests. State systems governed by democratic trans-Atlantic terms of reference would be sought to be established. The individual social requirements, traditions and cultures of the countries of Africa and Asia will be questioned and they are likely to be diminished. Political and economic pressures, even coercive pressures, may be generated for this purpose.

Second, regardless of the claims regarding an emerging equitable and fair economic order, the orientations would be to create a globalised free market economy in a manner in which the advanced industrial countries would remain dominant and influential. Controversies which have arisen after the signing of the Marrakesh Agreements in March 1995 and the additionalities regarding social clauses, intellectual property rights and the time frame for speeding up the implementation of the WTO's export and import regimes confirm this prospect.

The third phenomenon characterising world politics would be the orientation of the foreign policies of the important powers to maintain and acquire access and control over raw materials and natural resources of the world, especially of infrastructural, economic and strategic importance such as oil, natural gas and minerals. The alertness with which this objective is attended to was first indicated in the speed with which the former US Secretary of State James Baker visited Kazakhstan to negotiate his country's entry into the Kazakh economy, even before the revised arrange-

ments of relations between the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and the Russian Federation were finalised in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union (in 1991-92).

Another example was the alacrity with which a consortium of businessmen from the USA visited Congo in the summer of 1997 when Mobutu was about to be ousted from presidency by a military coup. These businessmen entered into negotiations with leaders of the anti-Mobutu forces and paid an advance of \$3 billion to them for long term access to the natural resources of Congo. The basic aim was clear: that advanced countries should not fall short of essential raw materials, nor should their pre-eminent economic position be eroded.

The fourth characteristic of international relations which India would have to cope with is the objective of the industrially advanced western countries to maintain long-term exclusive control over sophisticated technologies. Regimes governing the transfer of higher technologies being put in place since the beginning of the 1980s have sent out a clear signal that the industrialised advanced economies consider unrestricted transfer of technologies to the developing countries a threat to their capacity (i.e. of the industrially advanced countries) to maintain a competitive edge over the majority of countries of the world.

The emphasis on the concept of 'dual use technologies' and the anxieties that such technologies should be made available to the developing countries under restrictive and discriminatory disciplines and subject to strict safeguards establish the validity of the assessment regarding the acquisitive motivations of the more important powers which I have mentioned earlier. This restrictive approach has manifested itself in the export policies of the advanced countries regarding supercomputers, computer hardware, higher electronics, lasers, robotics, genetic engineering, and technologies related to the management and utilisation of biodiversities.

This acquisitive competitive approach goes beyond the transfer of technologies originating in these countries. The manner in which certain aspects of intellectual property rights and international standards for the patents clause are sought to be structured militates against the traditional capacity as well as the self-reliance of developing countries. The struggle which India has engaged in to prevent western entrepreneurs from patenting the use of neem and turmeric for medical and health purposes is a case in point. These items have been used as ingredients of traditional medicines

and healthcare in India for hundreds of years. The move to claim royalty rights and economic returns on the use of these items under new names and new packaging patented in the West is a blatant attempt at intrusive exploitation. This phenomenon is not going to abate. The processes of globalisation will be used as an excuse for such purposes.

The discriminatory and restrictive approach regarding the transfer of technologies will fundamentally affect the capacity for self-reliance, productivity and the ability to produce quality goods in the developing countries. The competition generated by a free market economy can be useful and relevant only if it ensures fair play, equity and justice in international economic transactions. Though this is the declared rationale for adhering to the mainstream of international economic trends, in certain dimensions, the actual development indicate intentions to the contrary.

That meeting the aforementioned macro-level, political, economic and technological objectives necessitates the US and other important powers of the world to maintain their military and technological superiority over a majority of the countries of the world is not just an undeclared objective, it has been articulated. Statements made by former President George Bush and President Bill Clinton and by leaders of the European Union and to some extent, even of the Russian Federation since the end of 1991 and beginning of 1992, have expressed the following views:

The new world order should aim at preventing the emergence of militarily powerful countries (except those which are already militarily powerful and nuclearly weaponised) as regional or sub-regional hegemonies. (A corollary of the preceding view is the insistence on discriminatory non-proliferation of various kinds of weapons of mass destruction and insistence on reduction of conventional forces and conventional armaments). The national and regional export control policies of the advanced countries back up this objective of multifaceted restrictive regimes controlling the transfer of technologies.

The introduction of the concepts of 'irresponsible' states and 'rogue' states into the lexicon of international law and foreign policy is part of this exercise. To be candid, except the United States and Iraq, no other country has used weapons of mass destruction without provocation on civilian populations. The inclination to apply this label to other countries on the basis of political motivations, other than the objective criteria developed by the UN, should be noted.

The policy of restricting the military and technological capacities of countries which do not fully conform to the stipulations of the great powers is not just a political stance. This stance has found operational expression in the last three decades of the 20th century. The attack on Osirak nuclear facilities in Iraq by Israel, the fulfillment of Henry Kissinger's warning to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that his nuclear weaponisation policies would lead to disastrous consequences for him (for Bhutto), the US's coercive stance on Iraq in 1990 and 1998, and the airstrikes on Libya in the 1980s prove this point.

It is also significant that US officials, while mounting military pressure on Iraq in January/February 1998, articulated the view that the policies towards that country were not just aimed at Baghdad, but they were also a signal to other countries which may have inclinations to acquire weapons of mass destruction; whatever their security concerns or justifications may be. These US officials further expressed the view that those countries which do not abide by stipulated international disciplines on non-proliferation matters should be ready to forfeit their sovereignty, if necessary under pressure of superior military force.

The expectation that, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, the UN would become stronger, more democratised and play a more effectively impartial role in ensuring world peace and stability, has not been fulfilled. The UN, at least during the 1990s, has become more of an instrumentality of foreign policy objectives of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and particularly that of the United States. The UN has been used either as a cosmetic umbrella, or a fig leaf, for the USA's political and military moves in reordering the world with the support of the other important powers.

The manner in which the crises in Yugoslavia, Somalia and Iraq were handled leads one to this conclusion. If we add to this list the powerful multilateral financial institutions operating on the policy orientations of western advanced countries, it becomes obvious that the emerging world order would remain subject to the overarching influence of the United States and that it will remain unfairly competitive and acquisitive.

While countries such as the Russian Federation, Japan, China and, to some extent, France and Germany may be able to counter the aforementioned trends on specific issues related to their respective national interests, the rest of the world would have to succumb and adjust, unless new patterns of strategic under-

standings emerge and new power equations are established between some of these powerful countries and the more important developing countries such as India.

One must also mention, in parenthesis, the likely framework of UN reforms. While the Security Council may be expanded with the addition of some more permanent members, it will be dominated by the European powers. The existing five members will retain their veto while the new permanent members are unlikely to be given this power. The advocacy or abolishing the veto will not get a positive response. The developmental and economic role of the UN will progressively shift away from it and will be concentrated in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The World Bank).

International commercial and technological arrangements will not only technically, but also politically, fall within the jurisdiction of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). A beneficial development in some respects, it could, however, be disadvantageous if the WTO were to toe an entirely western line.

The increasing empowerment of peoples worldwide, generating democratic political impulses, combined with the speedy facility of obtaining almost unrestricted information, will generate significant centrifugal forces in those societies which cannot cope with the rising social and economic aspirations of their peoples. These centrifugal forces will find expression in ethno-religious or linguistic movements within state structures, threatening their very stability and unity. On the other hand, countries which are successful in economic management, and in creating a satisfactory quality of life, would become part of the centripetal arrangements of the type exemplified in the European Union and the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Association). I would have mentioned APEC (Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation) and ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) also, but given the economic upheavals that have affected ASEAN since the middle of 1997, I exclude them from these centripetal orientations for the present.

These then are the broad trends in the international situation that India's foreign policy would have to deal with well into the 21st century. The capacity of our foreign policy to cope with the complexities which I have mentioned is inextricably linked with our current politico-economic and social predicament. The positive ingredients of this predicament during the little more than 50 years of our existence as an independent country are that we remain committed to car-

rying on the processes of national consolidation and government through democratic means.

We have ensured food security for our unmanageably vast population. Despite our intensive diversities we have managed, though just barely so, to maintain our political cohesion and unity. Barring the loss of territory at the end of the 1962 Sino-Indian war, we have sustained our territorial unity and integrity. We are endowed with natural resources and technologically qualified manpower though the latter has not been developed to its optimum potential, nor has it been utilised as judiciously or as effectively as we could have.

There has been a general consensus with regard to perception of our national interests and foreign policy orientations. Despite the shortcomings in our foreign policy and critical perceptions about us in the countries of the region and in the international community at different points of time, we have sustained a practical working relationship with most of our neighbours and with a majority of the countries of the world. Even where there are abiding adversarial relations with one or two of our neighbours, we have managed to prevent them from degenerating into military confrontation, at least over the last two and a half decades of this century.

On the negative side, first, we have to acknowledge that the quality of politics in India has declined in many vital respects. Second, the efforts at national consolidation and reconstruction have made slow progress. We have failed to achieve the minimum required standards in the fields of education, public health and infrastructural economic capacities. We rank rather low if we apply the international 'quality of life' index to our society. We are subject to a rising curve of ethno-linguistic and religious fissiparous and secessionist tendencies. Despite being conscious of the imperative requirements of national security, our defence capacities remain inadequate.

Above all, we have not been able to cope with the unmanageable increase in our population. The most optimistic estimate is that by the year 2050, India's population will stabilise around 1.5 billion. If we add to this figure demographic pressures that may be generated on us by a population of nearly 300 million in Bangladesh and between 270 and 320 million in Pakistan at that point of time, the consequent political ramifications are daunting.

While we have managed to maintain a tenuous normalcy in relations with most of our neighbours, they remain subject to undercurrents of tensions related to specific issues or the perceptions about us in the neighbourhood regarding our hegemonic intentions. We are

afflicted by a general ambiance of indiscipline and lack of national purpose. We are generally considered a soft state with the additional problem of our exaggerated sense of self and our unrealistic desire to be acknowledged as a leading nation unrelated to the perceptions about our political stability, or the substance of our economic, technological and military power.

This listing of inadequacies was necessary as they constitute a barrier of limitation on our capacity to structure a foreign policy capable of meeting the challenges ahead. What then are the tasks ahead? And what can we do to fulfill them? First, the short and medium-term objectives to be attended to. Ensuring the continuity and territorial integrity of the Indian Republic is a matter of the highest priority in this respect. The certainties which animated our national struggle for freedom and the initial idealism about India's national unity stand eroded with the passage of time. Ethno-centric, linguistic and religious centrifugal tendencies have challenged Indian unity, be it in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab or the North-Eastern states. These tendencies, combined with territorial claims of neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and China, remain a threat. Though we have generally preserved our territorial integrity and are structuring equations with these two countries to prevent territorial alienation, fissiparous forces, undeniably, exist.

The foreign policy dimension of the problem is that such forces find encouragement from foreign countries and foreign sources. The threat is not limited to claims articulated by neighbouring states such as Pakistan or China, but forms the undercurrent of orientations in strategic policies of important countries such as the United States and the more cohesive nation states and regional groupings. Maintaining durable peace and equilibrium in power equations would be easier if the international state system did not have to cope with large geopolitical entities or states endowed with economic power and military strength competing with each other.

Whatever the superficial analysis and arguments about the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia may be, one substantial dimension of their fragmentation was the strategic planning and political encouragement rendered to the process by western powers led by the United States. Breaking up two pluralistic states with a sense of self, one of which was a superpower, was the practical application of the objective of politico-strategic domination or pre-eminent influence of the western camp.

The same motivation is reflected in the foreign policy approach of the United States and Russia in con-

taining China and subjecting it to multilateral international disciplines and regimes. The deeper motivation in generating pressure on Iraq, as well as in keeping it isolated, and in questioning the long-term viability of India remaining united is the same.

Our foreign policy would have to assiduously create a regional atmosphere and equation with important power centres of the world which would prevent external encouragement to the inherent centrifugal tendencies affecting our polity. This step would involve an imaginative responsiveness to the aspirations of different segments of the Indian people and nurturing at least a non-adversarial, if not friendly, relationship with our neighbours and establishing a pattern of relations with important power centres of the world within the framework of which they will perceive a united India serving their broad economic and strategic interests. There will have to be decisive, even coercive, resistance to separatist forces originating from other countries and foreign agencies. This is not an *a priori* predication that India will continuously face a confrontationist situation with the international community. It is only emphasising that we must be aware of undercurrents of political realities in evolving international equations.

The second important objective of India's foreign policy would be to ensure an atmosphere of peace and stability in which India can focus on its economic development and can also cope with the complex problems affecting the well-being of our people. This process would involve not only the fashioning of an appropriate domestic economic policy, but also the formulation of a 'foreign economic policy' which would ensure the necessary financial, technological and foreign trade inputs to meet India's developmental requirements in the broadest sense of the term.

In terms of present calculations, India needs an investment of roughly \$80 billion per annum in the infrastructural sector of its economy (energy, surface transport, ports, power generation, telecommunications and so on). Moreover, foreign policy has a vital role to play in creating peace and stability in our region and ensuring India's image as an attractive economic partner in the process of global cooperation to meet the aforementioned objective. The technological dimensions of our foreign economic policy should particularly focus on enhancing technological potential and on increasing India's capacity for self-reliance in science and technology.

The third objective would be to create national defence capacities to protect India's unity and territorial

integrity, a capacity which should primarily rely on our resources and our own technologies, but which should also be based on a balanced and sufficiently diversified pattern of external inputs in a manner wherein India does not become excessively dependent on one country or the other or one group of countries or the other. This precautionary step would involve calibrating our nuclear weaponisation and missile policies and those related to the structuring of the three wings of our armed forces on lines which would be responsive to changing international power equations and technological developments.

The overall aim should be to nurture and develop our strengths without confrontation and without being isolated to the extent possible. This exercise would involve diplomatic skill, tact and flexibility of the highest order in the context of the developing international situation where the more important powers are aiming at fashioning a world order which will perpetuate their pre-eminent position.

The fourth objective would be to strengthen regional cooperation and to work for mutually beneficial equations between the South Asian and other regional groups and associations, so that regional cooperation becomes an instrumentality not only for peace and stability but also for long term security and economic well-being.

The fifth objective would be to strengthen the UN, its organs and specialised agencies keeping in mind two goals: first, to enable the UN to truly reflect the interests and aspirations of majority of its membership and, second, to restrict to the extent possible the UN becoming an instrumentality of superpower policies. All issues affecting reforms should be dealt with keeping these goals in mind. This task will not be easy, given present indications of UN reforms being undertaken in a selective and elitist manner based on the orientations of the more influential powers. India beseeching a permanent seat on the security council is not a solution.

India must endeavour to be strong enough in every respect, attract sufficient voluntary support from the general membership of the UN and, based on this strength, be an influential voice at the UN. As this process will take time, in the interim phase, India should use its influence to make the UN more democratic by advocating the cause of greater representation for the smaller countries in the important organs of the UN and its agencies.

The sixth task would be to undertake the necessary organisational and institutional reforms in the

Ministry of External Affairs and in the Indian Foreign Service to enable the foreign policy establishment of India to fulfill its required advisory and executive role to meet the following objectives. This initiative would involve the modernisation of recruitment methods, concentrating on area and functional specialisation, and facilitating lateral inclusion of specialists of different categories in the foreign service. These steps would also involve the creating of institutional mechanisms for interdepartmental coordination and consultation within the GOI and between the central and the state governments to meet foreign policy objectives at given points of time. Creation of a National Security Council and the post of a National Security Adviser with clearly defined responsibilities and powers should be an essential part of this exercise.

The seventh short or medium term task would be for India to focus on managing its relations with Pakistan and China, so that the inherent tensions in its relations with these countries do not affect our vital interests. Also, a special relationship with the United States, Russia and Japan should be fashioned in the context of their undoubted political influence and economic clout which is likely to last into the 21st century.

Having speculated on the short and medium term objectives and the required responses to meet them, it has to be emphasised that the nature of the challenges and India's response to them would evolve in the context of broad trends in international relations. These trends at the end of the 20th century have been touched upon in the earlier section of this article. The next obvious question would be: on what lines would these trends evolve in the first years of the 21st century? One can only speculate.

The possibilities are that nation states would have to reluctantly give up some aspects of their sovereignty, thereby facilitating international supervision and monitoring of economic, political, technological and military phenomena. The system of monitoring would be determined by the important powers and managed by them. The UN would be marginally strengthened and democratised, but it would function mostly under the influence of the United States and the western democracies. But nation-states would still need their own economic and technological capacities as well as armed forces for safeguarding their vital national interests.

The nuclear weapon states may agree to some kind of time-bound nuclear disarmament and, consequently, they would be more assertive in generating pressure on conducting inspections against countries

which would not abide by their non-proliferation agenda. This possibility would be subject to the limitations that none of the nuclear weapon states would place their nuclear forces under UN supervision. None of them except China would be willing to commit themselves to 'no first use' of their nuclear capacity. Most nations of the world would have signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. There would be progressive pressure to eliminate the military missile systems and to prevent countries from missile development. Chemical and biological weapons would have been effectively banned. Some regional groupings, specially the NAFTA, NATO and the European Union, would become more influential and effective instrumentalities of the foreign policies of those countries.

Russia and China would not be entirely happy with the aforementioned scheme of things and may be looking for new strategic equations to counter the unidimensional influence of the United States on international affairs. The US response may be to contain China through equations with Russia and/or India, while China and Russia may be interested in a similar equation with India to counter the USA's strategic pre-eminence. If India remains united, becomes politically stable and economically and technologically strong, it could acquire a leverage in playing an important role in international relations.

What should be India's response to the aforementioned trends? First and foremost should be a focus on dealing with macro-level problems such as population control, environment management and economic development. Creating a strong Indian economy in the mainstream of international economic trends would lay the foundation for resisting intrusive international pressure or competition. India should acquire limited nuclear weapons and IRMB capacities to a level where regional or global powers would accept that generating pressure on India would not be worthwhile. The Indian army, air force and navy should be modernised, strengthened and endowed with sufficiently advanced weapons systems which would prevent military actions of the type which Iran and Iraq faced in the 1980s and 1990s. India should retain the freedom of option to adjust to external strategic threats and economic challenges detrimental to its interests.

India, therefore, would face a complex world in the 21st century in which it has to survive with just a little over 50 years of experience as a modern nation-state. This survival has to be ensured in the context of the abiding reality in international relations that gov-

ernments of great and influential powers command resources and military strengths that they use primarily to fulfill their perceived interests. As far as the international order consists of nation states, act in terms of who their institutional strengths, economic resources and technological capacities, foreign relations will remain a competitive phenomenon, occasionally prone to confrontations. India's foreign policy, therefore, has to predicate itself on *realpolitik* rather than on purely moral considerations or an idealistic world view, however desirable the latter may be.

Foreign policy experts have asserted that towards the end of the 20th century the future of foreign relations will depend on how countries and their leaders cope with five new imperatives in the international situation. First, a nuclear war is unthinkable. Second, everything must be done to dispel suspicion and nurture international trust and security, even when confronted with profound hostility or radical contradictions. This implies a willingness to maintain communications and nurture cooperation at every possible level, to the extent possible. Third, despite the requirements of adjusting to *realpolitik*, states should have sufficient faith in moral values to be convinced that they do not need war and military conflict to survive and flourish. Fourth, while deterrence or balance of terror provides temporary peace and stability, in fundamental terms, the arrangement is questionable. And fifth, the collective commitment to evolve an international mindset which will endeavour to create a fair and just world order should animate the foreign policies of all countries.

A principled and moral response to these unexceptional imperatives should be the overarching purpose of India's foreign policy in the 21st century, but it is not entirely possible. So in the interim phase, Indian foreign policy will have to deal with continuing contradictions between the amoral ground realities of world politics and the moral norms which we and the international community aim at. The endeavour would remain that of reconciling responses to the international situation, as it is likely to be, and the aspirations of what the situation should be in moral terms.

Cohesion and purposiveness in our foreign policy in dealing with this multidimensional dilemma would depend entirely on the creation of a national consensus based on enlightened public opinion responsive to our changing national interests in a continuously changing world.

J. N. DIXIT



# In search of a foreign policy

BHABANI SEN GUPTA

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee who also made himself minister for external affairs, initiated the search for a new foreign policy for India with five nuclear tests at Pokhran on 11 and 13 May, that is, within just about a month of his coming to power. The tests proclaimed India as a nuclear power and sought the world community's recognition of the country as one. It blew the long time consensus of keeping the nuclear option open but refraining from nuclear tests. The nuclear blasts, which came to be popularly known as Pokhran II, put in a tail-spin the entire praxis of India's foreign policy and foreign relations. As the decision was taken in a very narrow time frame of no more than a week, the tests were conducted without seeing through the immediate, medium and long term fallout.

The BJP as a political party had long been committed to make India a nuclear power. Its election manifesto promised nuclear tests if it were able

to form the government. The government that was formed in early March and headed by A.B. Vajpayee was, however, a coalition in which BJP was by far the leading member, but more than 86 short of a majority of its own in the Lok Sabha. The nuclear test issue was not discussed with the coalition partners. By its very nature, the decision had to be taken by a small number of people in total secrecy. It is doubtful if the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, was privy to the decision though he became an immediate and most vocal champion of the nuclear tests.

The foreign policy community in India, especially the strategic 'sub-community', had long asked for nuclear weapons in India's armoury. The people of India have never been educated on the unspeakably disastrous consequences of a nuclear bomb exploding anywhere on Indian territory. As a result, the urban Indian middle class entertained a romantic idea

of the majesty of nuclear weapons, almost echoing the American rhetoric that put a great halo around the Ultimate Weapon as the most convincing symbol of military and technological power in the post-Cold War world.

**T**here was little surprise therefore that Pokhran II was loudly welcomed by almost the entire middle class, especially the strategic community. Even political parties which, while in government, had refrained from nuclear testing readily joined the euphoric chorus hailing the May tests. Dissent came in the immediate wake of the nuclear tests only from the small but vocal minority that had long argued against nuclear testing by India. However, within a week of Pokhran II, the political divide about nuclearisation got back to the floor of the Lok Sabha. The Congress-I spokesmen accused the BJP and its allies of hyping India's threat perceptions and damaging the painfully constructed tepid friendship with China. Communist MPs blamed the government of starting a nuclear arms race in South Asia.

The nuclear tests upset the entire framework of Indian foreign policy and sponged out the long time consensus. The Indian tests inevitably brought about six reactive tests by Pakistan. The BJP leaders in the government, especially Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, made certain provocative statements on Kashmir which were successfully calibrated to push the Pakistan Prime Minister, Mia Nawaz Sharif over the brink. In spite of earnest pleas by President Clinton, Pakistan carried out its own tests in the last days of May.

The Indian tests were justified by a deliberate enlargement of threat perceptions from Pakistan and China. Indeed, China was the villain of the threat scenario fabricated by George

Fernandes and the BJP leaders of the government. It was the Chinese tests of 1964 that had triggered the demand for an Indian nuclear bomb by a steadily expanding group in the foreign policy and strategic community. The Chinese tests persuaded Indira Gandhi to adopt the Sarabhai plan for long term nuclear research with a distinct bias for possible weaponisation. The Pokhran test of 1974 proclaimed to the world India's technological capability to make nuclear weapons. The test was described as 'peaceful'.

**T**he official pronouncement said that nuclear blasts would make it easier for India to build large dams and to explore mountainous terrain for possible deposits of precious minerals. Gradually, India acquired the technological expertise to build its own reactors which were placed outside international inspection. More than 30,000 scientists and engineers were employed on an increasingly ambitious nuclear research programme. Leading nuclear scientists like Vikram Sarabhai, M.G.K. Menon, Raja Ramanna and, particularly, the present chief scientific adviser in the defence ministry, Abdul Kalam fueled the appetite for an Indian nuclear arsenal. India's exploits in the sophisticated realm of space and missiles acted as stimulants for nuclearisation.

International, especially American, experts and agencies probing probable candidates for nuclear proliferation began to speculate in the eighties about the state of India's nuclear aspirations and capabilities. It was assumed that India had assembled a modest basket of experimental nuclear devices. Pakistan too was not sitting idle. With technical assistance from China and desperate procurement of technology and material from different sources, including Ameri-

can, by means fair and foul, Pakistan too acquired a certain amount of bomb-making capability in the eighties. Indian and Pakistani military leaders projected the view almost simultaneously at the turn of the decade of the nineties that nuclear capability in both countries acted as a deterrent. This deterrent prevented a war between India and Pakistan even when a widespread armed anti-Indian insurgency exploded in the valley of Kashmir in the early years of the present decade.

Covert nuclearisation by India and Pakistan created anxieties in the United States which is the prime creator and defender of the prevailing international nuclear power regime. The Americans put a lot of pressure on Prime Minister I.K. Gujral to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The treaty contained an 'entry into force' clause which required the signature of India and Pakistan for the document to come into force. This clause was inserted without consulting India.

**A**part from that, the CTBT confirmed the differentiation of the international community between the five established nuclear powers and the rest of the world which was to remain committed to non-proliferation. It contained no commitment by the nuclear powers to rid the planet of nuclear weapons even within a very long time-frame. Mainly for these reasons India did not sign CTBT. Gujral at one stage offered India's signature to the treaty if the five nuclear powers agreed jointly or unilaterally not to strike any non-nuclear state with nuclear weapons. Among the nuclear five, China alone had made a no strike commitment with regard to non-nuclear countries. The Indian proposal did not receive a positive response from the nuclear powers.

When the BJP coalition government conducted five nuclear tests in May, one of them thermo-nuclear, and Pakistan followed suit with six tests, they automatically invited comprehensive economic sanctions by the United States. Five industrial countries—Canada, Japan, Germany, Sweden and Australia—joined the American sanctions. Relations between India and the United States had gone through ups and downs through the decades of Indian independence. However, the United States was India's principal trade partner and a fairly large and diverse area of mutual cooperation came to be built in the eighties and nineties including low level strategic cooperation. The relationship came to a halt as a result of Pokhran II. Investment flows from the US dried up except what was already in the pipeline.

**T**he Japanese sanctions were limited to Official Direct Aid (ODA) of which India was the largest recipient. Unofficial investment flows did not come under the sanction regime. But corporate Japan followed the Americans and stopped new investments. So did Germany, Australia and Sweden. Britain did not join the sanctions, but British investments also stopped coming into India. A high level Indian trade delegation visited London in the summer only to draw a blank in commitments from the British business community.

Until October 1998, foreign investment in India was a little over one third of the investment flows of the corresponding period in 1997. The Times of India on 12 October reported that industrial growth dipped to 3.6% in the first half of 1998-99 from 6% in the corresponding period the previous year. Although Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha assured in August that the economy would begin

to look up from September, a climate of gloom set in as the year proceeded to its end, and competent bodies forecast a 5% GDP growth in 1998 compared to almost 7% in the three previous years.

**T**he government, however, took a number of measures to augment hard currency inflows and give a boost to the economy. The Resurgent India Bonds floated by the State Bank of India netted a handsome \$5 billion though an undisclosed part of it was transfer of money from other accounts to the Bonds by Indians. NRIs failed to rally to the country's rescue from the sanctions. The BJP coalition government faced an economic slowdown that was showing signs of a recession at the end of the year. The government drew up plans to further liberate the domestic economy from government regulations and control, to cautiously increase the pace of privatisation of public sector companies, and to engage some of the captains of the private sector in the task of revitalising the economy. However, prices of essential commodities kept rising fearfully beyond the lean purses of the mass of people. Exports declined. In less than a year, the foreign exchange reserves diminished by some \$4 billion. The BJP's flag of swadeshi or self-reliance flew only at half mast.

The BJP leadership engaged first in repairing the relationship with the United States. The prime minister found in Jaswant Singh, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, a sober, moderate, pragmatist special envoy for a long, complex and difficult dialogue with the US government represented by the Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott. Even after six rounds of secret talks the dialogue was in a tunnel. The two sides were evidently trying to sort out such complex issues as weaponisation, deploy-

ment, restraint of production and deployment of medium-to-long range missiles, India's participation in negotiations on a fissile material control treaty and commitment to sign the treaty as it came out of the negotiations, and inspection and verification of India's nuclear commitments. Prime Minister Vajpayee, on his part, declared that India would not undertake any more tests, would be willing to formalise the unilateral moratorium by signing the CTBT before September 1999 with some unspecified modifications, and that India would confine itself to building a minimum nuclear deterrent which would be defensive in nature. However, he did not define a defensive minimum deterrent, while a segment of BJP-oriented strategic analysts forcefully argued for an open-ended deterrent.

**L**ack of satisfactory progress in the Indo-US diplomatic bargaining on the nuclear issue led to the postponement of President Clinton's visit to India (and Pakistan) in 1998. Nor was Vajpayee invited to visit Washington. In October, the White House decided to relax the sanctions on Pakistan in order to pump enough oxygen to its seriously sick economy and bail it out from default on debt servicing. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was going to Washington in December presumably to commit Pakistan's adherence to CTBT as well as meet some of the other US non-proliferation demands. Prime Minister Vajpayee betrayed a deep faultline in the BJP's proud slogan of swadeshi by criticising Clinton for being 'partial' to Pakistan. He chose to recognise that Pakistan's economy was in a far worse shape than India's so much so that The Economist in a leading article on 17 October, described Pakistan's economy as 'crumbling'.

After the nuclear tests, India's relations with China came to an ominous

standstill. Beijing took serious objection to leaders of the BJP coalition, especially Defence Minister George Fernandes, describing China as India's enemy number one and hyping India's threat perceptions of its nuclear power neighbour. Indeed, Indians had been citing China's nuclear arsenal as a real threat to its security ever since the late '60s, and the tests of May 1998 were justified mainly on the continued nuclear threat from the East.

**B**y reviving the enemy image of China, the Vajpayee government invited a pale cast of frost on the considerable improvement in India-China relations achieved by more than 15 years of painstaking diplomatic engagements by the two countries. As a result of these engagements, the Sino-Indian border remained tranquil for a full decade, a mosaic of confidence building measures had worked well on the north-eastern sector of the border, border trade had crossed a billion dollars per year, and India was able to withdraw most of the troops from the north eastern sector and deploy them on the western front. The joint border commission had six sessions. Though no progress was made in resolving the dispute, the fact that the dialogue was continuing ensured that the border would remain peaceful.

The Chinese government quite clearly did not enjoy India and Pakistan going nuclear. It had helped Pakistan develop its nuclear weapons programme at least till 1993 when it promised the visiting Indian Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, that it would stop any dealings with Pakistan in nuclear related technologies. China claimed that it was strictly observing that commitment though the CIA and several other official and unofficial agencies in the United

States continued to find ongoing nuclear dealings between Beijing and Islamabad. The BJP government chose to lend greater credibility to these US disclosures which were echoed and repeated by pro-Bomb Indian strategic writers and think tanks than on official Chinese disclaimers of these accusations. After the South Asian nuclear tests of May 1998, China raised several other issues that it said had strained relations with India. It accused India of indulging the Dalai Lama in his political activities within India and in the western world, and took serious objection to Fernandes' rhetoric about 'liberating' Tibet from China's 'imperialist control'.

**D**uring a visit to Pakistan in October-November 1998, this writer found that China had done nothing to succour its 'traditional friend' since the tests of May. It had turned down a Pakistani request for nuclear protection. It did not offer Pakistan any financial help to tide over its foreign exchange crisis. It did not build up any pressure on the border with India, nor disturb the decade-long border tranquility. China kept up its pressure on Pakistan to sign the CTBT without conditions. It did not change its stance on Kashmir. There was no support from China on the 'right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination.' Beijing held on to its new policy that Kashmir is a bilateral issue between Pakistan and India and should be resolved between the two through peaceful means. It condemned Osama Bin Laden's terrorist activities from the soil of Afghanistan. China, in fact, remained as wary of the Islamic extremism of Taliban in Afghanistan as did India and many other countries.

The only satisfaction China gave Pakistan—it may be described as a consolation prize—was that it almost froze relations with India. In doing so,

however, China betrayed its fear of a nuclear India. Indeed, a nuclear India changed China's security scenario more patently than India's. Indians often expressed a feeling of being 'surrounded' by nuclear China and Pakistan as a fledgling nuclear power, with American nuclear might visibly stationed on land and under water in the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. China had now to contend with the menacing nuclear might of the United States with its commitment to the security of Japan, and its readiness to intervene in the event of a Chinese attempt to take Taiwan by force, and a nuclear India with the capability of growing into a credible nuclear power. The Chinese government must therefore be closely watching the diplomatic dialogue between the United States and India, and they are unlikely to return to the process of improving relations with India until New Delhi signs the CTBT.

**O**fficials of the Indian external affairs ministry expended a great deal of time, energy and resource explaining to neighbours and neighbours' neighbours, as well as leading members of the Non Aligned Movement, the imperatives of India going nuclear and assuring them that a nuclear India did not pose a threat to any one of them. ASEAN, with which India's economic and even strategic relations blossomed in 1996-98, especially during the rule of the United Front government, was critical of nuclear weaponisation of South Asia at the post-summit dialogue in Manila and at ASEAN meetings held there shortly after the explosions of May 1998.

At the SAARC summit in Colombo, South Asian leaders other than from Pakistan articulated their security concerns in one-to-one talks with Vajpayee though the issue did not come up for formal discussion at the

regional forum whose constitution keeps security matters outside its agenda. At the Non Aligned summit in Durban, the new chairman of the Movement, Nelson Mandela, the only charismatic leader left in the Third World, listed Kashmir as one of the major flashpoints in the world and caused the Indian delegation led by Vajpayee much embarrassment and anger. So much so that Vajpayee himself had to join issue with Mandela, while his aides sweated to keep Kashmir and nuclearisation of India and Pakistan out of the declaration issued at the end of the summit.

Indian diplomats patted themselves on the back for their success in keeping Kashmir and the tests of May out of the official communiques or declarations issued after the important events like the NAM and SAARC summits and the ASEAN's annual dialogue. However, they could not convince nations with close interactions with India that the nuclear tests made no difference in world politics and that it was business as usual between India and the rest of the world.

It was not business as usual. After the Asian currency turmoil and the political changes that shook Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, came the serious recession in Japan, which was followed by a global economic slowdown taking on unmistakable aspects of a global recession. The Asian 'flu' infected Wall Street manifesting tell-tale evidence of how the global economy had qualitatively changed in the last quarter of the 20th century. Only the economies of China and India remained relatively secure thanks to their comparative isolation from the global market and the process of globalisation. Both avoided official devaluation, but both were more than inching towards it. Both faced an economic downturn, but China's

8% and India's 5-5.5% growth compared very favourably with the dismal growth rate of the once-hailed tigers and dragons.

The bleak Asian economic landscape and the looming global recession would have greatly enhanced the attractiveness of the vast, reasonably stable and cautiously opaque Indian market which starved for vast investments in infrastructure, telecommunication, information industry as well as a broadly pre-modern agriculture. The nuclear tests of May cost India a mass of opportunities. Even an undefined minimum nuclear deterrent meant enhanced defence spending particularly because political factors, bureaucratic inertia, and shortage of jobs made cutting the fat off the huge 1.2 billion strong standing armed force to a slim-and-trim, modern, streamlined, far more efficient force impossible. Back-of-the-envelope calculations of the cost of the Indian *force de frappe* varied from Rs 500 crore to Rs 40,000 crore a year. The government was in no hurry to come out with its own estimate, nor with a nuclear doctrine beyond the ambiguous statement of 'a minimum credible deterrent.'

The only silver lining in the otherwise bleak horizon of India's post-Pokhran II foreign policy was the opening of a comprehensive dialogue with Pakistan in the fall of 1998. The concept of the two countries engaging in a comprehensive security cum development dialogue was incorporated in an agreement reached between Nawaz Sharif and I.K. Gujral, Vajpayee's immediate predecessor belonging to the United Front, in June 1996. But the talks froze before they started because of Pakistan's insistence that Kashmir be exclusively discussed between the two foreign secretaries as it was the 'core issue', and India's refusal to concede the demand.

The ice broke at the SAARC and NAM summits partly under not-so-hidden American pressure on both countries, more on Pakistan than on India. In November 1998 the foreign secretaries met to talk Kashmir, and in quick succession several other meetings at the level of secretaries took up other security issues as well as trade and cultural exchanges. At most of these first encounters, after a long interval, the two sides, predictably, read familiar scripts, but decided to keep the dialogue going despite the initial lack of progress. On trade and cultural exchanges, however, some progress was made creating prospects of commercial channels opening up by land and sea, with Pakistan, finally, agreeing to give India the most favoured nation status. The neighbours between whom exist large areas of mutually beneficial trade and commerce woke up at last to their obligations under the upcoming South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA).

In other areas, Indian foreign policy waited for the powers and nations to accept India with its nuclear tests if not as a nuclear power, at any rate as a power armed with nuclear weapons and a delivery system. Diplomatic contacts with no single government broke down or got frozen. But the wheels of diplomacy moved but slowly. Fewer world leaders visited the Indian capital. Atal Behari Vajpayee in the first seven months of prime ministership visited only five capitals. His government did not inflict visible injuries on the Gujral Doctrine that dramatically changed India's relations with the smaller neighbours and adopted a deliberately designed strategy of going East to the Pacific in search of friends and flows of investment and commerce.

However, the lumpen elements of the Sangh Parivar (RSS, BJP, Shiv

Sena, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and other front bodies) drove batches of 20-25 Bangladeshi illegal migrants and pushed them across the border into Bangladesh with the help of the Border Security Force (BSF) and put the otherwise excellent relations with Dhaka to needless strain. The BJP leaders showed little sensitivity about the fundamentalist pressures on the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wazed, from the extreme Islamic Taliban in Afghanistan and its raucous supporters in Pakistan as well as Bangladesh.

Since the nuclear tests of May, the Indian mass media sought to downplay the importance of foreign policy and external relations and got engaged with security, especially nuclear arms. Unfortunately, India was 20 years late with its nuclear tests. It indulged in history's longest debate on whether to go nuclear, and when it finally determined to cross the Rubicon, the global trend was against nuclear weapons and towards their abolition or drastic reduction.

To be sure, the arsenals of the two major nuclear powers, the United States and Russia, alone were enough to wipe out human civilisation several times over, and France and China had not even joined the process of reducing their nuclear armour. Nor did nuclear weapons go out of the military doctrines and rhetoric of the nuclear five. However, with the CTBT gaining the status of a global treaty, and negotiations about to begin for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, global trends and processes were clearly and conclusively towards a world less, and not more, under the active thrall of the Ultimate Weapon. Indian and Pakistani tests underlined the fragility of the non-proliferation regime and impressed on the nuclear powers the imperative of pacing up the slow-moving process of nuclear disarmament.

# Politics in the Russian Federation

HARI VASUDEVAN

IT is a telling fact of discussion in India of Russia's South Asia policy that seven years after Soviet disintegration, prominent figures compulsively speak of 'Indo-Russian friendship'. *Druzhba* remains an obsession among commentators, despite the recasting of Central Eurasia in 1991, and the clear reorientation of Moscow's foreign policy priorities during Andrei Kozyrev's stewardship of the Russian Ministry of External Affairs.

This persistence in perspective partly follows from a 'new course' in Russian foreign policy under Evgenii Primakov: a course designed to correct the western tilt of the early '90s. It is also a consequence of the constant use by lobbies in New Delhi and Russia of *druzhba* as a touchstone irrespective of regimes: their remarkable achievement in keeping the rhetoric of amity alive in the bureaucracy and the media. In the Russian Federation, India's 'special relationship' with the country is privileged almost as much as the historic connection with Serbia, and it is regarded as less problematic than close connections with Iran, Iraq and China. In India, despite overtures towards the USA and Europe, the Russian link remains important in South Block and among the armed forces.

'Friendship' remains alive, though, for reasons more substantial than ministerial preference, rhetoric and lobbying. It is the result of the circumstances that Russia and India have lived with since the end of the Cold War, especially the limited benefits accruing to them from liberaliza-

tion and globalization. Here, proper adjustments of economic relations between India and Russia during the Burbulis visit of 1992 and the Yeltsin visit of 1993 have provided markets and resources to both countries without incurring pressures on unsteady currencies. The advantages have been important to a crucial sector: the badly beaten military-industrial complex in Russia and the defence establishment in India, which has faced demands for cutbacks.

**T**he consequence must be, in the immediate future, that, whatever the problems raised by the nuclearization of South Asia, Moscow will stand by its old ally in a range of international disputes and incidents. Uncertainty hovers over the terms of the support, for there will be no unconditional underwriting in Moscow of Delhi's views on missile technology transfer or nuclear proliferation. A sympathetic ear, though, and a range of material support will always be forthcoming.

Most of this is self-evident in Smolenskaia Ploshchad and South Block. It is the standard currency of mutual understanding between Russia and India. But what is increasingly important are the terms of the relationship: i.e. the why and where of support. For the position today is not comparable to the two decades following 1971. Indo-Russian friendship, moreover, lacks an ethnic or linguistic association (which exists in the case of Russia's relations with Serbia, for instance). It is not based on religious connections (i.e. Orthodoxy), or a century of discourse concerning 'fraternity'. It is not fundamentally historical, reinforced over time and verging on the elemental, whatever the attempts by Indian and Russian historians to show a centuries-old search for closeness.

Here, the uncertain ambit within which 'friendship' existed was evident following the events at Pokhran on 11 May. 'Positive' signs were quickly advertised by the government in New Delhi. Russia consistently refused to frame sanctions against India for her 'breach of nuclear ethics'. Although Boris Yeltsin expressed his displeasure concerning the Indian action and he firmly stood by the terms of the NPT and the CTBT, he never went beyond this.

It was evident in Moscow, as it was in India, that Vajpayee had followed an unfortunate and dangerous course in making this country nuclear. But the anomalies of the world's nuclear regime and India's respect for the ground rules of international conduct were also evident. Hence, Yeltsin's criticisms were muted, and the significance of his posture was reinforced by laudatory remarks by senior Russian military officials concerning the Indian action and congratulations by parliamentary leaders Gennadi Ziuganov from the Communists and Zhirinovskii from the Liberal Democrats.

**A**mong some commentators, Yeltsin's failure to support US policy on India was put down to domestic compulsions to appear self-assertive in the face of communist criticism concerning 'tailism' in dealings with the West; echoes of Euro-American condemnation of the blast, meanwhile, were regarded as a necessity to Russia as a signatory to the international non-proliferation regime. There was clearly more to the president's stand. Like France, the USSR, the Russian Federation's nuclear predecessor, was never, in spirit, in accord with NATO definitions of non-proliferation.

It avoided a non-proliferation treaty for almost two decades after the explosion of the atom bomb. And dur-

ing SALT talks, it was singularly secretive about all aspects of its strategic rocket programme and the related research which constituted the hub of the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal. Arkady Shevchenko, a leading figure in Soviet peace planning, when Andrei Gromyko was external affairs minister, firmly stated in his memoirs that the USSR was seldom serious in its arms limitation dealings. This spirit carried on to the Russian military establishment which is powerful in Yeltsin's entourage.

**S**ince 1995, moreover, after a period of 'tailing' the USA on almost all international issues, Russia charted an independent foreign policy course under External Affairs Minister Yevgenii Primakov. This change was partly the upshot of Russia's inheritance of the Soviet nuclear stockpile, and her annoyance with US restrictions on her capacity to use the formidable nuclear expertise to help resolve her economic problems. It was not only the great dinosaur of the Russian military-goods establishment – *Rossvoruzhenie* – but also a number of plants strung out from St. Petersburg to Novosibirsk that wished to sell nuclear-related technology, and they constituted a lobby for going soft on minor transgressions of the international non-proliferation regime. For them, the G8 declaration and the confusion among Euro-American commercial interests over India investments was useful: it kept open avenues for business. China had been a good customer, and Europe had not been far behind. India appeared promising.

Despite all this, though, the ambivalent position that the Russian Federation had to take on nuclear issues was evident to observers. Various interests which made a pro-India tilt uncertain were essential elements of

the 'new Russian' foreign policy. Russian policy-makers had come to swing firmly towards Iran in their predilections. In this case, despite the Shia-Sunni antagonisms that divided Iran from Pakistan, and their disagreements over Afghan affairs, Iran was not wholly hostile to Pakistani interests. She saw in a Pakistani nuclearity, and an 'Islamic bomb', the future of her own acquisition of nuclear hardware; and she was clearly keen to maintain good relations with Islamabad.

Yevgenii Primakov, in turn, as Russia's foreign minister, had been clear that Iran was crucial to Russia's interests in Central Asia and the Caspian neighbourhood. President Karimov of Uzbekistan had proved an unreliable safeguard for these interests, and Primakov had come to look to friendship with Iran as a source of assistance in the scrimmage over the oil and gas of the Caspian shelf. The USA, here motivated by a range of oil interests, had refused to accept Russia's dominance in the area, even though it had accepted Russia's rights to police Central Asian borders in 1997.

**I**ran's coincidence of interests with Russia, meanwhile, had been self-evident. Russia provided Iran's expanding ports on the Caspian (e.g. Engeli) with a vast traffic, especially from Astrakhan. Russia also provided great business for Iran's fleet in the area. In return, in defiance of US arguments, Russia had agreed on transfer on nuclear know-how to Iran. In the circumstances, Primakov would have clearly been reluctant to irritate his West Asian ally who was unlikely to favour actions fundamentally hostile to Pakistan.

28 A further factor which placed limits on a pro-India policy in Moscow at this time was the firm China hand that had been played at

Smolenskaia Ploshchad: a stand which would have to take note of China's alarm at India's nuclear status. China trade supplied Russia with an increasing trade surplus and an excellent market for arms – submarines, C-300 solid fuel anti-aircraft missiles, missile guidance systems and SU-27 fighters. After the USA and Europe, China was a favoured market in Russia.

**F**inally, recent vicissitudes notwithstanding, the social politics of the Russian ruling elite did not direct government towards a rapprochement with India to the detriment of other sources of investment and aid in the West, and especially the US. This was revealed in the crisis which brought Prime Minister Kirenko to power in early May, which demonstrated the authority of the westernizers in Moscow until very recently. The crisis was deliberately brought on to ensure that in the event of Boris Yeltsin's death, Viktor Chernomyrdin, who was closely associated with the old managerial elite of the Soviet state, would not succeed to the presidency.

The conspirators here were Anatolii Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, who were Kirenko's masters. The former was the lead figure behind privatization and the darling of the West, while the latter was the former Nizhniy governor who gained great status as a supporter of privatization. Both understood that Chernomyrdin's authority lay in his links with the genus of state corporation conglomerates that have emerged from the Russian reforms ('holding companies', 'concerns', 'financial investment groups' etc.). These were agencies which were privatized but which had close links to government and were rarely dependent on western aid. They were not 'communist' in political leaning, but they had no great affection for Washington.

In the circumstances, Chernomyrdin's presidency would have been a victory against the full-fledged privateers – those who depend on foreign investments, quick money and speculative trading. It had to be avoided, and the capacity of the Chubais group to prevent it demonstrated its authority in Russian affairs. This may have been the consequence of support from US funds, which was publicly despised, and the work of millionaires and media moghuls such as Berezovskii and Gusinskii who were singularly unpopular. But the power of 'westernizers' had a decisive quality. Gubernatorial mandarins from Sakha to Kaliningrad depended on them for crucial services with private banks and foreign investors. Agricultural associations and trade unions could exercise no restraint on the privates. Boris Yeltsin's 'court', as well as his electoral campaigns, have been wholly dependent upon them.

**T**he appointment of Evgenii Maksimovich Primakov as Russian prime minister in September has hardly changed these circumstances. True, Primakov is an India hand of sorts and a quiet protagonist of good relations with the USSR's old allies. His appointment as foreign minister in 1996 marked a determined break from Andrei Kozyrev's pro-West policies of the preceding three years, and an assertion of a 'Russia first' syndrome at the Ministry of External Affairs at Smolenskaia Ploshchad. Primakov was also the architect of the resurgence of Russia's interests in Iraq and Iran, which, along with Egypt and Syria, he knew very well. He has been looked on with a degree of suspicion in the West. In many respects, consequently, the new prime minister's appointment appeared to signal a further step in the possible remaking of the pre-1992 establishment in Russian politics.



With this some have come to anticipate a powerful Russian presence in global affairs, with off-beat views on economic organization and international regimes, capable of withstanding US hegemony. The emergence of communist authority in Russia is regarded as the pivot of such a 'renaissance', and Primakov's appointment is occasionally regarded as a major step towards such a development. Hereafter, runs one argument, only the presidency remains as a possible bastion for the revolutionaries of 1991 – those intent on changing Russia's Soviet priorities. It does not matter that Primakov was a Gorbachev man who has got on with Boris Yeltsin. Many have come to regard him as the weak prime minister who will act as a cat's paw for the left alliance in Russian politics. They feel he may be the means whereby the success of Gennadii Ziuganov, head of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), may be ensured in the presidential elections of 2000. Or he may act as a pro-tem pro-left president before that, should Boris Yeltsin become incapacitated.

**T**he grounds for reading Primakov's appointment in these terms are clear. They go well beyond his own record as a Brezhnev loyalist and a KGB fellow traveller while he was a Pravda correspondent. His appointment came, with unanimous communist support, at the end of a steady consolidation of the political hold of the CPRF on Russian institutions. Thereafter, he has chosen to show his preferences by making a known statist, Maslyukov, his finance minister. This has occurred at a national level while the communists have a leading role in the Patriotic Front which dominates the lower House (Duma) of 450 deputies. Here, the CPRF had 149 deputies and, within the front, they work with a 'left alli-

ance' of the People's Power Group (37) and the Agrarian Party (35). With Zhirinovskii's Right (51), they have made a dominant 'nationalist' front.

**T**he opposition to them has been divided and scattered: Chernomyrdin's Our Home is Russia (55), the liberals of the Yabloko bloc (48), the Russian regions' group (42) and various independents (33). Elsewhere, a large number of the governors represented in the parliamentary Upper House (Federation Council) have been elected with communist support, and the CPRF has a strong hand in local government bodies. Communist strength is so great that there were negotiations with the president about power-sharing earlier this year (which raised alarm among communist allies).

Primakov's position, if his sympathies are read right, may be seen to give communists access, in the future, to appointments in major state corporations and an inside role in the ministries, where control had eluded them so far. They would seek little else for fear of acquiring the stigma of the regime's economic failures. The prime minister has not been expected to stand against them, even if he has stated that he will not be guided by any single party. This, some have argued, was why the CPRF did not ask for diminution of presidential authority when they accepted Primakov's nomination for prime minister. Viktor Chernomyrdin, whom the communists rejected, was a different public figure altogether. Although he was a 'red manager', i.e. a technocrat with ancient regime credentials, he had charted his own course and established a formidable base in Russian politics.

By January 1998, Chernomyrdin was the most powerful man in Russia after the Russian president.

Prime minister for five and a half years, he had a better knowledge of the country's administration and politics than anyone else. He had informal control of a large parliamentary grouping (the Our Home is Russia Party). In January this year, he came to establish a major hold over the energy complex, military finance and the military goods monopoly (Rossvooruzhenie). The latter was important given its international and national influence; and Chernomyrdin filled a vacuum created by the dismissal of presidential functionary Alexander Korzhakov, who controlled the organization from the government end, and the resignation of Korzhakov's men in the presidential apparatus. Chernomyrdin's main weakness (which brought him down in March this year) was his alienation of the coterie around Yeltsin: the westernizers Boris Nemtsov (an influential deputy prime minister), and Anatolii Chubais (the head of privatization), Yeltsin's daughter, Tatiana D'iachenko, and the president's chief of staff, Valentin Iumashev.

**H**owever, there are many ragged edges to such a reading of Primakov's appointment – 'edges' which have clear foreign policy implications. Extremely important is that the powers of the presidency over the cabinet and key ministerial appointments have been left almost untouched during the September crisis. The assumption clearly was that Yeltsin would be too unwell or politically weak to make substantial use of such powers. But the circumstances left open the possibility of his reassertion of authority. Should Yeltsin recover from his recent ill health, consequently, he has the capacity to use his 'rights' to serious effect – perhaps to bestow some favour on the communists' favorite whipping boy, Anatolii Chubais. Yeltsin has

clearly shown in this last crisis that he values his powers. It was clearly for the sake of these that he finally abandoned Viktor Chernomyrdin, despite his knowledge that he would make the best prime minister in existing circumstances. To gain support for Chernomyrdin in the Duma, however, would have meant concessions which would have paralysed Yeltsin and his coterie.

**I**n the circumstances of a recovery, Yeltsin may use important advantages to gain the upper hand in the country's policy-making in the near future. The CPRF and most Russian political parties are strongly divided on ideological and programme grounds. Among the communists, for instance, Tatiana Astrakhankina represents a 'traditional' line against the national communism of Gennadii Ziuganov. Parties also lack powerful institutions for public mobilization to counter presidential action. The CPRF, which was born out of the CPSU, never had any, except the official trade unions of the old order. Not only are the latter – represented by the FNPR body – weak (except in the case of the miners' organizations) because of their history of bureaucratization, but they lack clout given the current state of the economy. Off-beat, liberal-inclined unions (represented by Sotsprof) have little credibility because of their association with the establishment. The networks, meanwhile, which underpinned the 'movements' of 1989-92 (affiliated to the Democratic Union and the *Demokräticheskaiia Rossiia* movement) have almost all collapsed in recent times: so communist allies are as weak as communists themselves.

With the strategic moment of the September crisis gone, therefore, it is unlikely that the communists can bring pressure to bear on President

Yeltsin before the elections of 2000. Again, as Federation Council support for Chernomyrdin's candidacy in the second round of voting in September indicated, there is no certainty that the communists can enforce their authority on provincial executives on a regular basis. Governors and the republican presidents of Tataristan and Bashkortostan are capable of playing with international investment funds and ethnopolitics to give themselves leverage in the case of a national emergency.

Other means that the president will use to preserve his authority include his hold over foreign investment agencies and major sectors of the economy (such as oil and natural gas). These advantages ensure the limited loyalty of powerful governors such as Guzhvin of Astrakhan (where the Caspian oil business is crucial), and functionaries such as Alexander Permiukov in the Khanty-Mansiiskii region (another centre of the gas and oil business). The difficulties of finding money for the economy without Yeltsin's blessing have already been shown in Volgograd, where the communists are assertively in power. Budget-wise, the region is in the black, but the administration finds investment with great difficulty.

**A**re-emergence of Yeltsin's authority will undoubtedly have important foreign policy implications in such circumstances. For India, there may be little cause for concern given the great hold of the defence establishment at Yeltsin's court and the favour which India enjoys within the presidential apparatus. The Russian president, however, is a maverick figure in Russian politics. He has many associations and connections with the West which have proved a major problem to Indian defence and foreign policy interests in the past. In the even-

tuality of his renewed ascendancy, the functionaries who surround him would have to be observed with care.

**T**his is all the more true since the Russian economy still lives in hope of western assistance, and the westernizers will be crucial in brokering any arrangements. The current economic crisis is clearly the result of poor reserves (c.\$17 billion) and government issue of credit paper (GKO's) to the tune of some \$70 billion to keep a number of sectoral and public banks in work. Meanwhile, revenue levels are poor and Moscow is playing with high levels of debt to the West (primarily Germany). The only alternative to western assistance, as a 'solution' of sorts to the crisis, is an inflationary spiral which would be unwelcome.

Ill health and the demoralizing consequences of his economic reforms, of course, will always be major problems for Yeltsin. Equally important, the apparatus which must use his advantages has been severely crippled by the praetorian regime of his head of security, Kozhakov, who was dismissed some two years ago. The adhocism and terror of this time bruised the institutions that Yeltsin's former chief of staff, Sergei Filatov, attempted to piece together. Some 'repairs' are now being slowly undertaken by Yeltsin aide Valentin Iumashev, but he has found his task difficult. There is also the danger of rampant bouts of popular violence, which the president also has to fear.

In the circumstances, however great the strengths of India-Russia *druzhba* today, the character of Russian politics itself requires caution for any detailed prognosis of the immediate future. Undoubtedly to forecast the restoration of all but the semblance of things past appears somewhat premature.

# A cosy relationship

ANURADHA M. CHENYO

INDIA and Russia have both made paradigmatic shifts in their foreign policies and worldviews in the 1990s. Russia, charting its course as a new nation in transition to capitalism, made a systemic and epistemological break with its past. It rejected theories of imperialism, shunned contradictions with the West and shed beliefs on natural alliance with the Third World. The new and pragmatic foreign policy regime of Russia decided to accept realism as its creed and locate itself as a 'normal' state within the European Union, with similar aspirations both for its people and state.

Simultaneously, India felt trapped in a fast globalising world. The mandarins of South Block were called to rethink reality and realism. They now perceived that their allies among the non-aligned were either sinking into a debt trap or were forging ahead as 'local tigers' with their own set of regional alliances. India was, moreover, bereft of an ally in the Soviet Union. The old problems on her borders remained unsolved. The decision by the mandarins was then to shed the tried and trusted foreign policy ideals and push for integration with the globalization phenomenon.

This globalization phenomenon translated into foreign policy meant a simple reassertion of national interest

by cozying up to the remaining super power and establishing superiority within the South Asian region. The BJP government, who saw this as an appropriate moment to realize their ambition of a hegemonic India, made a real break with the past. Once in power, they created an atmosphere of fear and aggression *vis-à-vis* Pakistan and China and went ahead with the nuclear tests in Pokhran in May 1998.

How did Indo-Russian relations fit this mould of new thinking? Did the aspirations of the two foreign policy regimes match with the reality that they understood? How could Russia withstand pressures from the USA on defence deals with India? These are some of the issues this paper seeks to address.

The comfortable groove of Indo-Soviet friendship and decades of bilateralism had to be re-worked after the Soviet collapse. Would the new Russian state hold to its views on South Asia, given its new proximity to the West and especially to the USA? The foreign policy document brought out by the Yeltsin regime as a marker for its early years emphasized Russia's relations with the USA and the European Union. Though the Yeltsin regime repeated its commitment to India and echoed India's concerns on Kashmir, it was not until President

Boris Yeltsin's visit in 1993, followed by meetings in 1994 and 1997, that India and Russia once again felt at ease in reworking their strategic relations.

**I**t was the reality of globalization which pushed India and Russia into a strategic and economic alliance. In Russia the neo-liberal economic policies which advocated a complete destruction of Soviet type institutions and market led growth, led to a complete collapse of the Russian financial and economic system. Foreign aid and investment was far below expectation and was completely tied to import of western goods. The trade balance between Russia and the West was skewed against Russian goods. The secure COMECON trading bloc was over.

In these circumstances Russia once again had to look for its old allies – in India, the Middle East and South East Asia. Russia then made a second shift in its strategic thinking. While ideological proximity and alliance with the West was to be given emphasis (not necessarily priority), Russia's foreign policy aims were to be realized in the CIS 'near abroad' and with old allies in the Middle East and Asia. Bringing in Yevgeny Primakov as foreign minister in 1996 concretized this shift.

Independent Russia expressed the goal of inheriting the strategic space of the former Soviet Union in the post-Cold War environment. This meant that Russia would have to exercise through multiple ways a leverage over the rest of the Commonwealth of Independent States, especially the Central Asian Republics (CARs), strengthen relations with China and South East Asia, increase its negotiating capacity with the European Union and maintain an alliance with the USA.

Reality, however, ordained otherwise. Ever since the establishment

of independent Russia, its interests in Europe, the Middle East and in Asia have clashed with those of the USA. The Russians were opposed to East Europe's inclusion into NATO; Russia opposed US policy in former Yugoslavia and backed Serb interests through the Bosnian crisis. On the question of Kosovo, the Russians have opposed NATO military positions. It continues to support the Iranian and Iraqi governments as far as possible. In South Asia, Russia continues to support India on the issue of Kashmir, is opposed to its internationalization and, in opposition to US pressure, continues to supply defence equipment and nuclear power technology to India.

**O**f course, Russian opposition to USA on all these issues does not display the severe contradictions and the military or ideological opposition of the Soviet times. The rhetoric is missing, but the opposition continues. This opposition is based on Russian national interest and traditional alliance structures with these states, which the Russians would like to continue with. While the form of Russian strategic policy has radically changed, its content has more continuity than they would like to admit.

On the question of Afghanistan, Russian opposition to the Taliban is based on its fear of the conflict and fundamentalist ideology spreading into Central Asia, especially bordering Tajikistan, which is guarded by Russian troops. Russian press and foreign policy literature has squarely blamed the US-Pakistan nexus for reinforcing the Taliban. In Central Asia, the Russians have clearly reasserted their economic and strategic relations through multiple bilateral and multilateral agreements. But in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, the Russians are in direct competition with US oil companies. The geo-politics of oil

bring the Russians into conflict with the West, especially as control over pipelines and new trade routes are being established.

**I**ndia has made efforts to build ties with the CARs, but has had to compete with Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, China and the West. Here, India has faced some disadvantages because of the establishment of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) which links up the Islamic states of the Middle East and Pakistan with the CARs. It is clear that relations with the Central Asian states can be built along three lines: independent bilateral relations; multilateral relations with Iran and the CAR as was done in the case of the India-Iran-Turkmenistan gas pipeline agreement; and multilateral relations between Russia-India and Central Asia. Building links with the CARs through Russia implies an advantage for India because Russia continues to exercise strong leverage in the CARs. The Russian-CARs trade links have been re-established and Russia is a major player in the Central Asia region. Indian and Russian interests coincide in the CARs. It would thus give India a clear geo-strategic advantage to link up with Russia in this region.

Russia, along with the rest of the international community, was critical of the May 1998 Indian nuclear tests, stating that it had felt let down by India. The tests were in sharp contrast to the 1987 Moscow declaration signed by the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. In this declaration both powers denounced the dangers posed by aggressive nationalism, separatism, religious extremism and terrorism. Both countries demanded a nuclear free world and opposed further nuclearization. On the Indian nuclear tests, there were differences in the Russian political spectrum because the Russian Communist Party

supported the tests. Overall, Russia retains its old position that India sign the CTBT and become a party to non-proliferation treaties. It, however, has opposed the economic sanctions imposed by the USA and has refused to impose sanctions itself.

Russia was one of the states which promised to support India for a seat on the Security Council and thus has demonstrated to the Indian foreign policy establishment its loyalty to Indian positions and an understanding of India's strategic aspirations. Though US strategic analysts do have threat perceptions about a possible Russia-China-India nexus, for the moment it would be in Russia's interest if India could become a power to counter China and hold its own vis-à-vis the USA in the future. Though the Russians see no threat from either China or the USA, the Russian-Indian strategic link seems inevitable. There is thus the belief that there exists a possibility of a 'strategic partnership' between the two.

**T**rade links between India and Russia had to be rebuilt from a position of disadvantage. The trade ties of the earlier Soviet era with India, based on the government sponsored rupee-rouble credit agreements, were of a structural nature. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the continuous collapse of the rouble, the situation changed drastically. Trade had to be conducted in hard currency through private and joint stock companies set up by the Russians. State trading was restricted to defence and some other items. Indian companies had to deal with a new Russian bureaucracy and the mafia, especially since trade had not stabilized in Russia. Indian goods had to compete with western and cheap South East Asian ones.

No wonder then, India's trade with Russia (in per cent shares) which

was 19.2 in 1980-81 fell to 3.3 in 1992-93, climbing up by 1.4 in 1994-95. The Russians initiated the practice of auctioning the rupees received as debt repayment and private companies continued to buy up these rupees. Both sides had disagreements on pegging an exchange value and felt cheated because of the old deals. Trade had to shift to hard currency. After the 1993 Yeltsin visit, subsequent meetings, especially the 1997 visit of Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral, led to agreements which framed guidelines to utilise the rupee debt being paid to Russia by India for the setting up of joint projects.

**I**n the past, Russia used this money for its imports from India under the trade agreements. But now an economic package to cover a vast area, including science and technology, financial and banking matters, transport, coal, oil, metallurgy, commerce and culture was included. The two sides had worked on some 85 projects under the earlier agreements on science and technology, including the development of a multi-purpose light aircraft, Sarasduet. These were revitalised.

Other ambiguities in Indo Russian trade deals like the five per cent reduction by New Delhi in the price of fertilizers (muriate of potash) imported from Russia were sorted out. One of the agreed measures, intended to facilitate trade flows, envisaged a consignment export scheme under which products needed by Russian importers (like tea and rice) would be stocked in Moscow warehouses. As a result, it would be possible to expedite supplies to them.

The Russian offer to set up a nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu at Koodankulam in 1988 was opposed by the Americans and was thus stalled for five years. Though it was revived

in 1993, the details of the project are still being worked out. The NPP features two power units each with 1,000 mwt water-cooled and water moderated reactors. Environmentalists have opposed the construction of these plants on account of the radioactive waste they would generate and because in the West nuclear power is becoming obsolete. But the Indian and Russian government are keen to continue with this project.

India's connections with Moscow always had a strong military side. Under the new regime, Russia is keen to continue with defence contracts, the receipts from which are in hard currency. Thus, despite US pressure on the Russians to stop military cooperation with India (which was a part of Clinton's talks with Yeltsin in September 1998), the Russians would like to strengthen defence exports.

**T**he reason for Russian interest is clear. Russian military-industry complexes are in great need funds. Despite the initial problems faced by the breakup of the Soviet Republics and dispersion of some defence industry, Russia revived the possibility of re-negotiating defence contracts and the contracts on rocket and nuclear power technology. The US tried to impose sanctions on the Russian firm Glavkosmos when it tried to sell cryogenic rockets to India. But here too, US advice was rejected.

Indian military and defence orders now sustain many defence industries in Russia, especially in St. Petersburg and Irkutsk, which would otherwise have faced closure at the time of transition in the Russian economy. India is the only country with which Russia has a long-term programme of military-technical cooperation, signed in 1994 and valid till the year 2000. This is to be renewed for another 10 years. Between 1992-96,

India imported Russian weapons to the tune of \$3.5 billion. This year the imports already stand at \$800 million. Annual orders from Russian defence industry work out to about \$2 billion. (China is Russia's only other partner on this scale.) Russian MIC Rosvoorouzhenie stated that Russian-Indian military cooperation would touch \$4.5 billion in 2000 and 6.5 billion in 2005 (Times of India, 27 March 1997).

**T**he Indo-Russian agreement on the sale of highly advanced air defence systems, clinched by an Indian defence delegation to Moscow in September 1998, was viewed by the Indian government as a feather in the cap for Indian security, especially in the context of economic and military sanctions imposed by the USA. The Indo-Russian defence deals contribute to the new arms race that has been set off in the sub-continent after the Indian nuclear tests and the Pakistani response in May.

Given the possibility of nuclear tipped Ghauri missiles and the Chinese M-11 missiles acquired by Pakistan, India sent a high level team to Moscow with a long shopping list. Six S-300V Anti-Tactical Ballistic Missiles costing billions of dollars are being purchased. Bilateral military programmes include agreements that both countries help each other's R&D efforts. India has a billion dollars programme with the Russians for the creation of new fighter planes, the SU-30KI fighters. India also gets naval hardware from the Russians and has recently acquired the 636-class submarines. Defence is thus the major component of Indo-Russian relations. It underlies the economic and strategic relations between the two. In fact, it is the most privileged part of the relations.

India and Russia have entered into a cosy state-to-state relationship.

This is a clean break from the old Indo-Soviet relation which, despite its state-centric approach, had advocated a Third World ideology with anti colonialism, a mixed economy and other alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism as an accepted ideal. The new relation has suited the regimes of both states as they aspire to transform their economies to neo-liberal style capitalist systems. The current regime in India has aspirations for regional assertiveness and hegemony, based on militarism in both its domestic and external dealings. That is why the dominant content of the relation between India and Russia is today based on defence contracts. The spiralling cost of defence expenditure appears of little consequence to the governing regime, which privileges threat perception to real development of people.

**R**ussia and India face problems of a similar nature. Economic problems related to the increasing poverty and growing inequality between people in these states is likely to exacerbate social tensions. Both countries face the problem of weak political institutions, pressurised by growing aspirations in their fragile democracies. Both are faced with trends of aggressive nationalism, rise in religious fundamentalism, regional separatism and sectarian movements. Besides the growth of a business mafia and increasing lawlessness, both states suffer the global phenomenon of cross border terrorism and narcotic smuggling. To survive, it is clear that both countries must be more responsive to their people and shift from an elitist, state-centred and realist discourse.

The reality is that a transforming power like Russia and a reforming/developing country like India have dramatic possibilities of collaboration and understanding. The point is to grasp them.

# Improving India-China relations

VINOD C. KHANNA

ON 28 October 1998, Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, speaking to a group of media persons declared, 'There are substantive problems in our relations with China but *this does not mean we regard it as our potential enemy*' (emphasis added). This is a significant step in an ongoing damage-control exercise designed to arrest the slide in Sino-Indian relations triggered off by a series of events in April-May, barely a few weeks after the BJP-led coalition came to power.

It is a measure of the national consensus behind the earlier policy of improvement of relations with China that credit for initiating it is claimed both on behalf of Prime Minister Vajpayee—recalling his trip to Beijing in February 1979 as the foreign minister in the Janata government headed

by Morarji Desai — and of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi — referring to his visit of December 1988. Both these visits were historic but still one may opt for an even earlier Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, as the true path-breaker. It was she who took the courageous political decision of reversing the increasingly sterile post-1962 bitterness. She adopted a series of bold steps including restoration of ambassador-level relations in 1976. In an inspired move she selected K.R. Narayanan for the job.

In recent years significant progress has been made towards laying a foundation for what is hoped would be a mutually beneficial multi-faceted relationship. Trade, for instance, has more than quintupled during the last decade, and India has overtaken Pakistan as China's most

important trading partner in South Asia. True, our bilateral trade is still rather modest. However, some observers point out that if one includes re-export of Indian goods through Hong Kong to China, the present figure would already be nearer a healthy looking US\$ 4 billion. The two have even begun investing in the other country. Interesting areas of cooperation are emerging in science and technology, culture and even public administration. There have been steadily increasing consultations in international and regional fora on economic, political and security issues.

One of the major barriers to further improvement in Sino-Indian relations has been the unresolved border issue. The issue has got deeply imbued with emotion because of a widely held view in India that China lulled India into complacency in the mid-fifties, professing eternal friendship, while it was actually planning to grab sizeable chunks of Indian territory, partly by stealth and partly by inflicting a humiliating defeat on an ill-prepared Indian Army in 1962. However, with passage of time, as emotions mellowed, recognition has grown that it is in India's interest that we take a more objective look at the territorial issue and the events leading up to the 1962 conflict. The same objectivity is necessary on the Chinese side. We have to accept that tragic errors of judgements were made on *both* sides. A reasonably accurate summary of some of these mistakes can be found in two recent articles by A.G. Noorani in the 14 and 28 August issues of *Frontline*:

In the discussions which have taken place between the two governments in the framework of the normalization process, it has been accepted that the solution to this sensitive issue has to respect the national

dignity and legitimate security concerns of both countries. Clearly, public opinion has to be prepared for 'a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement' – to borrow the vocabulary used by the two governments – which will inevitably involve some give and take. In India a national consensus accepted by all the major political parties has to be built. Understandably there is a feeling that we cannot surrender away parts of Indian territory. However, the truth of the matter is that even Prime Minister Nehru as late as 17 September 1959, told the Lok Sabha that though Aksai Chin had been shown as part of India in Indian maps, 'It is a matter of argument as to what part belongs to us and what part of it belongs to somebody else.'

By the same token China will have to 'surrender' large chunks of territory which its maps show as Chinese territory. One can also think of imaginative solutions to deal with those few pockets which neither is willing to yield to the sovereign control of the other side. In the meanwhile, backed by sound political leadership, the military and civil officials of the two countries have successfully negotiated a series of measures enshrined respectively in the 1993 agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the line of actual control in the India-China border areas and the 1996 agreement on the confidence building measures in the military field.

Occasionally one hears the somewhat curious view that India has gained nothing from these negotiations and that all the agreements have been in China's favour. We have not lost one more inch of territory since 1962. Since these agreements were signed not one shot has been fired in anger along the length of the India-China border or the LAC; not one

Indian soldier has died at Chinese hands. This contrasts rather sharply with what has been happening in the Indo-Pak confrontation. In this context it was heartening to note that Brajesh Mishra took the opportunity provided by the 28 October press briefing to reiterate India's continued commitment to the two agreements.

This evolution of 'peace and tranquillity' along the LAC had taken place against the background of gradually increasing mutual trust. The encouragement which China had extended to some of the internal insurgencies in India during the '60s and early '70s has been terminated. There has also been a decline in the anti-Indian content in the links between China and some of India's South Asian neighbours. Thus, for instance, one today rarely hears the kind of alarm which Indian security experts used to express not too long ago with respect to certain aspects of China's relations with Nepal and, to a smaller extent, in relation to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The Chinese assistance to Pakistan's military – including nuclear and missile – capabilities has been a worrying exception to this trend. Not surprisingly the protestations by China that its relations with Pakistan are normal state-to-state relations are viewed with extreme scepticism in India. It is argued that China seeks to ensure that India is forever constrained by a threat of two-front war and is locked in within South Asia so that it cannot emerge as a rival to China on the wider regional and global stage.

It is important to understand various elements in Sino-Pak friendship which has remained unshaken for more than three decades during which much else has changed on the international stage. It is obvious that shared strategic perspective about India has provided the primary motivation for



this entente. But there have been other important considerations as well:

- \* Through the 1960s, China had tense relations with *both* the super powers; in particular, the threat which China perceived from the Soviet Union became a critical determinant of its policies. As Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated and Indo-Soviet relations grew, security links with Pakistan made eminent geo-strategic sense for China;

- \* Pakistan proved a convenient intermediary when China and USA decided to normalize relations;

- \* China needed a friend in the Islamic world: Pakistan helped China commence relationship with Saudi Arabia and post-Shah Iran;

- \* Friendship with Pakistan should be seen in the context of China's problems with its rebellious Muslim province of Xinjiang.

**S**ignificantly, China did not intervene in any meaningful military sense during the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak military conflicts but it has, over the years, extended very substantial assistance in terms of military hardware and technology. It would appear that the Chinese have had a threefold motivation: (i) to ensure Pakistan's loyalty (important for all the reasons mentioned above) by tying her, and particularly its powerful armed forces, to China with bonds of dependence and gratitude; (ii) to ensure China's own security by compelling India to contend with the fact that any conflict could escalate to a two-front war; and (iii) to ensure Pakistan's security by giving it a credible deterrent against India.

The third argument would have been particularly compelling in the years that followed China's failure to prevent the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 and may have acquired a nuclear dimension after India's

nuclear test of 1974. It is also possible that there was some *quid pro quo* involved with Pakistan passing on some sensitive technologies acquired by her from other sources.

**H**owever, it cannot be in China's interest to encourage Pakistan to adopt provocative postures against India except in the event of China itself feeling threatened by India. An actual India-Pakistan conflict would present unpalatable choices. This was evident in 1965 and 1971. The emergence of both India and Pakistan as overt n-weapon states has only compounded the problem for China. In case of a serious crisis in South Asia with potential for escalation into a nuclear confrontation, the Chinese would face most unpleasant alternatives. So China does have an interest in peace on the sub-continent and, in particular, in seeing that tension over Kashmir does not escalate into a full-fledged war.

As far as China's grievances against India are concerned, it has been the Tibetan issue which has been at the top of the agenda. The Indian government has gone out of its way – indeed to the extent of courting criticism from champions of human rights – in repeatedly asserting that it recognizes Tibet as an autonomous region of China and that it is determined not to allow Indian territory to be used for activities directed against China. Brajesh Mishra in his 28 October meeting with the press welcomed reports emanating from Beijing that there were some prospects of negotiations between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama.

All the unresolved problems notwithstanding, few had expected the rapidity and magnitude of the downturn which began with the statements by Defence Minister George Fernandes identifying China as the

No. 1 potential threat (sensation seeking media reports made the statement sound even worse than they were) followed in quick succession by India's nuclear tests of 11 and 13 May, Prime Minister Vajpayee's letter to President Clinton explaining the rationale for these tests in terms of perceived threat from China and China's angry reaction.

Many of us find it difficult to celebrate the Indian decision to conduct nuclear tests but there is little doubt that India's long and hesitant journey in this direction began when China acquired successively nuclear and thermo-nuclear capabilities in the mid-60s. The reports of Pakistan's progress in the nuclear weapon and missile arena, with substantial Chinese assistance, further played into the hands of those who in any case wanted India to acquire weapons which they perceived as the new currency of power and prestige.

**O**viously, China as the only 'approved' Asian nuclear weapon state has a stake in the *status quo*. But there are genuine security concerns as well. China fears that the Indian and Pakistani moves could trigger off a chain reaction leading to unravelling of NPT/CTBT based nuclear non-proliferation regimes with potential long-term threats from some of its other neighbours, in particular Japan and Taiwan. She is also concerned about the destabilizing effect of actions of even such present friends as Pakistan and North Korea.

Careful analysis of Chinese statements on Indian nuclear tests suggests that their initial reaction was relatively mild but turned harsh after the leakage of the prime minister's letter to Clinton, coming on the heels of earlier statements by the defence minister. The fact that this letter was addressed to the American president

was interpreted in China as being a deliberate attempt to build a nexus with anti-Chinese lobbies in the USA. Visitors to China speak of the deeply hurt feelings in the Chinese political leadership which had personally invested in better ties with India over the last few years (see C. Raja Mohan's 4-part 'Beijing Journal' in *The Hindu*, 2-5 November 1998).

From our point of view it was particularly unfortunate that the nuclear tests came just a few weeks before Clinton's visit to China. But while we have every right to resent the tone of the Sino-US joint statement on South Asia, its denunciation of and demands on *both India and Pakistan* went no further than the P-5 joint communiqué and the UN Security Council resolution on the subject.

**T**here is no doubt that there is a convergence of US and Chinese interests on several issues. However, this should not make us assume that there is a more permanent and comprehensive content in their 'strategic partnership' than is actually there. It is wrong to believe that China and USA are moving towards a mutually agreed global duopoly, in which USA and China would divide the world into spheres of influence with South Asia being allotted to Chinese hegemony. This is a simplistic view of *both the US and Chinese policies*. The US is not about to appoint a perceived rival as the hegemony over such a critical area as Asia or any significant part of it; China has its own agenda and profoundly distrusts USA's long-term goals.

It is important that India and China commence a dialogue on nuclear and other strategic issues. Like all other members of the nuclear monopoly club the Chinese have long ago forfeited any moral right to lecture others on the virtues of nuclear non-

proliferation. As things stand, China cannot realistically expect that India will agree to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon power and to entirely abandon its nuclear weapon programme. Once China comes to terms with that reality it should be perfectly possible to work out bilateral nuclear CBMs and cooperation on global nuclear disarmament issues.

**A**t the 51st session of the UN General Assembly in 1996, China put forward a 5-point proposal on nuclear disarmament calling for drastic reduction of their stockpile by the largest holders of nuclear arsenals, no first use commitment by all nuclear weapon states and unconditional commitment of no threat or use against non-nuclear powers, no deployment outside one's own country, and negotiations for complete destruction of nuclear weapons.

India is perhaps the only other nuclear weapon power which can agree with China on all the above points and can offer to jointly work with China in all international fora on this issue. It should also not be difficult to reach a bilateral understanding on steps like no first use and detargeting. In the meanwhile China would no doubt have noted a whole series of Indian policy statements including the Brajesh Mishra 28 October assurance that India was not interested in entering into a nuclear arms race with China. If simultaneously there is an improvement in Indo-Pak relations, including such CBMs in the nuclear field as non-deployment, it would be possible to demand that China abide by its non-proliferation commitments.

But realistic students of international relations cannot assume that China is about to abandon entirely the role it has been able to carve out for itself in the regional balance of power, especially though linkages with Paki-

stan and to a lesser extent with other South Asian countries. However, it is useful to remember that the Pakistani commentators had watched the earlier evolving Sino-Indian rapprochement with some concern. One of the litmus tests used by analysts of the China-India-Pakistan triangular relations is China's position on the Kashmir issue. As Sino-Indian relations improved the Chinese tried hard to evolve a formula which Indians would find acceptable without offending their Pakistani allies. It began to drop references to the UN resolutions and to call for peaceful resolution through bilateral dialogue though there was some lack of consistency, particularly when it came to statements made in Pakistan, presumably under strong Pakistani pressure.

**T**he Pakistanis were particularly perturbed at the statements made by President Jiang Zemin during his visit to the sub-continent in November-December 1996. Even before Jiang arrived in Islamabad, Pakistani media commenting on his visit to Delhi spoke of India's success in significantly changing the contours of the India-China-Pakistan triangle. The speech delivered by him to the Pakistani Senate on 2 December was seen as hinting at the end of a special relationship with Pakistan. The Pakistani senators could not have relished Jiang's advice: 'If certain issues cannot be resolved for the time being, they may be shelved temporarily so that they will not affect the normal state to state relations.' There is no reason why this trend should not resume once the present crisis in India-China relations passes.

Many analysts who pride themselves on being hardheaded realists tend to dismiss as naïve idealists those who argue that it is both necessary and feasible for India to build mutually

beneficial relations with China. However, true practitioners of *realpolitik* do not base their policies on the worst case scenario but on a calm assessment of probabilities. They do not move on the assumption that any state is a permanent adversary. Recognizing that the international behaviour of countries is motivated by how they perceive their national interests, the realists seek to design an approach which makes even potential adversaries believe that it is in *their* interests to have good relations. They are aware of the permanent role of power in international relations but do not make the ingenuous assumption that national strength is exclusively or even primarily a matter of military might. All this is common sense and does not require learned tomes on strategic theories. The challenge before statesmen is to apply these easily comprehensible principles in a complex and changing world.

**W**hat is the kind of China that India shall have to deal with in coming decades? Over the last twenty years China has achieved the remarkably high rate of GDP growth at an average of 9% per annum. True, there are still horrendous economic problems: rising unemployment or under employment, the uneconomic state-owned enterprises bleeding the national exchequer, fragile agriculture, environmental degradation, stark regional imbalances, and the most imminently dangerous of them all, an indisciplined financial sector. The recent massive floods will also have some negative impact. There is great concern at present about the likely impact on China of the economic crisis in the neighbouring countries. But, it is salutary to remember that according to some serious calculations even if China's GDP growth slows down to 5.5% a year, it would match America's

GDP (though naturally, not remotely the per capita income even if we use the purchasing power parity formula) by 2015. Further, it is objectively true that China needs a peaceful environment in order to proceed ahead with its domestic economic aspirations.

**A** most potent barrier against change of Chinese intentions – or any other major power, for that matter – from benign to hostile is to build with it such a network of mutually beneficial linkages that the cost of switching would greatly outweigh any benefit. A certain degree of fluctuations in our bilateral relations – as between any two major powers – is inevitable. But these swings can be kept within a manageable range. Further, we have to learn to live with *simultaneous* cooperation and competition, friendship and friction. We both have an interest in the emergence of a multipolar world not dominated by a single power. There is space on the international stage for the legitimate aspirations of both China and India.

Some very important consequences follow from the simple demographic fact that China and India are far and away the world's two most populous nations. For a whole range of issues the only country whose experience is really relevant to Indian conditions is China and vice versa because of the sheer scale involved. It is therefore important to appreciate that when we say that India and China have to cooperate and to learn from each other, this is no mealy-mouthed diplomatic jargon: Food and agriculture, employment and education, environment and sustainable development – the list of critical issues on which the two Asian giants can cooperate synergistically is long and the implication for mankind on how these two ancient civilizations handle these challenges is awesome.

# India-Japan and the coming century

BRIJ TANKHA

THE decisive factor shaping Indian interest in Japan in the last two decades has been economic. Japan as a source of capital, technology and trade has motivated our policy planners to work out ways to attract Japanese investment, industrial collaboration, and government overseas development aid to India. Since last year these efforts seem to have been jeopardized as the financial crisis starting from Thailand savaged the economies of many of the Asian tigers and even Japan, that haven of high growth, has felt the pressures and its economy today seems vulnerable and weak.

Added to this has been the political fallout of the nuclear explosions carried out in May by the BJP government. These tests provoked the United States to impose economic sanctions with Japan and other countries following suit and stopping all but humanitarian programmes. Japan has a strong anti-nuclear lobby whose influence cannot be ignored. How will the interaction between the two countries develop and take shape in the coming

years in the context of these changes is of great concern as it touches upon issues affecting not just the two countries but the region as a whole.

The Asian economic crisis, though it began as a currency crisis with the plunge of the Thai baht, has created and reflects immense social and political problems. From the Korean peninsula through the arc of the countries of East and South-East Asia, all are confronted with problems that are undermining their political stability: unemployment, corruption or at least collusion between business and government, sharpening political divisions and a widespread questioning of the existing system. Economically, at least, all these countries are looking at Japan, and of course the United States, to pull their troubled economies out of this crisis. Japan has over US\$100 billion invested in South-East Asia and, therefore, has a strong stake in the region. Yet it is saddled with a lack-lustre political leadership that has yet to take a strong initiative to set its own house in order.

It too faces similar problems even as it takes steps to improve the regional economic environment.

**R**estoring order would require breaking the close nexus between business and government that has worked to mutual advantage, though not always for the public at large. The story is similar to that of South Korea or Indonesia or China. The recent trenchant critique by He Qinglian in *Behind the Pitfalls of Modernization* shows that the crisis is not merely economic but fundamentally moral. Each of the countries in the region are responding in their own ways. Thailand and Indonesia have continued to stress greater openness while Malaysia has begun to enforce greater monetary controls on the movement of capital, blaming the predatory activities of western speculators for a large part of its problems.

Yet they all face serious threats to their present political structure. Indonesia is at present passing through changes that seem to threaten its very cohesiveness buffeted by religious as well as regional strains. The unravelling of an often fragile consensus has had regional repercussions as the ability to act cohesively is undermined. Regional forums, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Commission (APEC) or the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) have been considerably weakened. Yet, even as anti-western sentiments are strengthened there is at the same time, for many sections, a stronger agreement that the US, perhaps along with China, is an important factor in ensuring stability in the region.

The economic downturn in Japan, the product of a prolonged recession, has seen the bursting of the financial bubble based on asset inflation. In 1995 Japan suffered a loss of about 4 trillion yen after the Great Hanshin Earthquake that devastated

Kobe and its surrounding region. The current collapse of its asset-inflated economy has, however, depressed the market prices of stocks and land by an estimated 500 trillion yen and 700 trillion yen respectively, a combined loss of 1,200 trillion yen. A staggering amount! Companies and banks have found it difficult to maintain their positions and many banks and financial institutions have gone under; the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank was just the first of many. The figure for the total of bad debts is put at 840 billion yen but many think it may be twice that amount. Japan, like other countries in the region, has taken measures to bail out banks saddled with non performing loans.

**I**n October this year the government proposed a US\$30 billion package popularly known as the Miyazawa Plan, after the Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. The package had two basic objectives. First to fund the nationalization of banks that had failed, viz., the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan, and second to provide funds to bail out banks whose position was precarious and to rescue depositors of failed banks. The effort to rescue these institutions has generated great political debate regarding whether the government is justified in using public resources to rescue private firms that have been grossly mismanaged and where, many felt, the government had to begin with colluded by overlooking or underplaying the seriousness of the situation.

The latest government measure announced on 9 November is a 22 trillion yen package that promises to revive the economy. The concessions the government has offered include 7 trillion yen in tax breaks and the package will involve spending 10 trillion yen of which about 2.25 trillion yen will go to traditional public works

projects and 1.25 trillion yen on other government-led purchases, such as schools and social service facilities. Some 200 billion yen will be spent as a wage-subsidy programme for small and medium sized businesses that want to establish new ventures. The government would pay one-third of the salaries for six employees of qualifying new ventures. And at least 1 trillion yen will go into a loan programme to help qualifying companies that could not get bank loans.

The continuing erosion of the value of assets has deteriorated the balance sheets of private banks imperilling their credit standing and putting further downward pressure on stock and land prices. Yet, paradoxically, a huge amount of money lies idle in household safes and bank vaults. The Japanese are said to have 1,200 trillion yen in financial assets and all this money is 'out of work' as it were. The problem is, as many have suggested, how to put this money to work.

**T**he seriousness of the situation and its effect is not confined merely within the country but has affected overseas operations and investments. Across the board, companies and banks are cutting down their overseas operations. Daiwa Bank and Fuji Bank, for instance, will shut down all overseas operations in less than two years by March 2000. Investments have dropped in China and many countries in Asia. The mood in Tokyo is sombre though the crowds thronging the shops and boutiques would seem to give lie to such a statement.

The measures taken by the government have been criticized by some for being too little and too late, but these combined with other regional aid programmes will hopefully lead to an economic recovery by next year. The United States has urged Japan to help Brazil and in a recent visit by

Prime Minister Obuchi to Russia the government has pledged an aid package. The lowering of interest rates in the United States and the European Union will also, it is suggested, lead to an improvement in the economic scenario. The strengthening of the yen against the dollar points in this direction.

**T**he perspective from India where Japan has been seen as a source of funding large scale projects, particularly in infrastructural development, does not look hopeful. The political fallout of the nuclear explosions has alienated large sections of Japanese public opinion, opinion that has not been particularly concerned or responsive to India at the best of times. India has not occupied a major place in Japanese thinking either at the popular or at the policy level and now sections sympathetic to India have also been alienated. In this situation what is the future of India-Japan relations and are there prospects of future improvements? These are questions that need to be seriously considered and not just from an economic perspective.

Japanese society is facing a host of pressures and the currents now competing for dominance reflect the way its people are re-considering both themselves and their relation to the region. These debates have an important influence in determining the way India-Japan relations will develop in the coming decades. In particular, present views about Asia are germane to the current discussion as they situate the bilateral connections in a context that reflects the place of this relationship.

The past decade has seen an increasing importance given to Asia and Japan's role in the region. Asia has always been a source of tension within Japan. At times it has been seen as an

area with which Japan is bound by ties of culture and values and at other times it has been seen merely as a vast hinterland to be exploited economically and ruled politically. Asia, for Japan, has primarily been the countries of East Asia. This tension in the relationship colours the present interaction. The Japanese government as well as sections of the intelligentsia have sought to project commonalities with the region and suggested that Japan could represent the region in international forums. However, the past and its present treatment continues to haunt and bedevil present projects. The history of the Japanese occupation of Korea and Taiwan, the 'expansion' into China and the co-prosperity sphere in South-East Asia has left questions that have yet to be resolved.

**I**n reaction to the internal criticism of Japan's past aggressions and present hesitation in acknowledging these actions, a growing body of public opinion has begun to argue that such criticism misrepresents the past. In fact, the revisionists argue that Japan has played a role in liberating and making possible the independence of many Asian countries. Fujioka Nobukatsu of Tokyo University has become a leading figure in reassessing Japan's past and, in fact, re-writing history to reflect these views. These statements have been countered by critics decrying the resurfacing or rather strengthening of rightist trends and pointing to the re-writing of history to suit partisan ends. The as yet unresolved problem of 'comfort women' and the need for apology for past actions are also part of this ongoing debate.

Yet, along with this distancing from its Asian neighbours there is also a greater appreciation of the region among certain sections. Courses on Asian countries are gaining in popularity, travel has increased and the

level of information available on East and South-East Asia is high. In the past decade it has also been steadily increasing for South Asia. The current rage among the young in Tokyo is Tamil films and Rajnikant in 'Muthu' (translated into Japanese as *The Dancing Maharaja*) has become a runaway hit.

India's economic relations have always been seen as about to enter a new stage of more intense activity. In the last decade or more the standard formula has been to say that the Japanese are slow in investing in new areas but when they make up their minds they move in a big way. That has not happened as yet but perhaps it will in the coming years. In general, even as companies and business temporarily draw back, there is a wider interest in society at large and this is a hopeful sign. Economic relations with India have improved since 1991; Japanese investments in India is in the region of Rs 62.3 billion and there are over 86 companies with their offices in New Delhi with others in the major metropolitan centres.

**A** survey carried out by the Japan Exim Bank reports that India is considered the second most attractive investment destination in the long term (that is in a 40 year perspective) and fifth in the medium term. Two-way trade has increased by 20%, yet India's share in Japan's global exports is still below 1%. Further, compared to other Asian countries our share in Japan's imports of manufactured goods is also under 1% while China is close to 10%. This obviously points to an urgent need to improve the situation.

And it's not just the figures. Our major exports continue to be marine products, gems, jewelry and iron ore. We have been unable to develop and promote manufactured goods. Again, while ODA has been successful, and increasing Japanese private invest-

ments have only exceeded ODA from 1994-5, so that while private capital flows are gaining in importance they are still small. The major issue facing us continues to be how to build more extensive business ties and this can only be done if a dense network of other ties is built. We have yet to attract the serious attention of the mainstream of Japanese society.

**T**he India-Japan symposium on 10 February 1997 highlighted future areas of cooperation in infrastructural development, telecommunication, food processing and other sectors which hold promise, such as computer software. While these are eminently sensible suggestions there are other areas that need to be highlighted. Japan could obviously be a source for learning about reducing energy consumption and controlling pollution. The symposium mentioned these areas but I think we need to develop cooperation not just at the industry or policy level but also through participatory programmes which ensure that these ideas and techniques are used by the people in their daily lives.

Perhaps it was inevitable but the major interest has been on the economic aspects of the India-Japan relationship. There has been an increase in other levels of contact and exchange but I think this must be broadened further. The bilateral relations between the two countries must not be considered only in the framework of industrial or diplomatic relations. I am particularly interested in seeing a wider level of contact at the political and cultural level. I think a broad-based and continuing exchange, perhaps through the Japan India Centre, if it is ever established; as well as through existing organisations and universities, will help to deepen our links and broaden our understanding. It may also point to new areas of cooperation.

Television is a major tool with a wide reach and we are getting programmes from around the world but little from Japan. The NHK is now broadcasting Japanese programmes through satellite television receivable in all parts of the world. This is a trend that is bound to increase and it will also mean that Japanese companies will possibly broadcast in English and other languages to reach a wider audience. If this trend provides alternative views and opinions it will help to counter the views of an increasingly uniform world media that is dominated by a handful of corporations. We need to have Japanese news, documentaries and entertainment programmes available. We need to learn about the region from the countries of the region rather than through BBC or the pages of English or US newspapers. The internet is another media which should be more generally exploited with greater imagination.

**T**he nuclear blast altered the diplomatic situation of India and created new pressures for the country. The Japanese imposed economic sanctions on India. The official explanation is that these measures, the Japanese do not refer to them as sanctions, were carried out in two stages. The first series of tests on 11 May led the government to suspend grant assistance and it withdrew the hosting of the India Development Forum due to be held in Tokyo. This was similar to the measures it had taken against China when it carried out nuclear tests. This grant assistance which was three times that of what India receives today was only restored two years later when it decided to adhere to the CTBT.

The second series of tests on 13 May led the government to introduce another series of measures: freezing or suspending yen loans (ODA) and take a cautious attitude towards future

lending by financial institutions. The officials deny that there have been any other measures affecting trade or investment. Humanitarian aid is not covered by these measures. Both lending by Japan Exim Bank and trade insurance to India by MITI is not covered by these measures. Along with the United States, Japan has lifted its 'economic measures' against Pakistan because it argues that the Pakistani economy is in a perilous state and that the government is closer to signing the CTBT than India. It continues to maintain these measures against India.

**T**he effect of government policy on Japanese investment is hard to identify. It is too early for the figures to say anything but the general feeling is that there certainly has been a cooling down of Japanese interest in India. This, however, may have more to do with the state of the Japanese economy and the Asian financial crisis than Japan's opposition to the Indian nuclear tests. The weakness of the Indian economy, as reflected in the weakening of the rupee against the US dollar and the falling stock market, is also an important reason.

In considering the bilateral relationship it is clear that Japan's international positions are still well within the US relationship. They are bound by treaty obligations as well as by popular choice and this is unlikely to change. Economically, though Japan may seem to be burdened by problems that have put a brake on the 'miracle growth', it would be prudent not to write off the economic strength of Japan. It may not be functioning as if it is on steroids but it has fundamental strengths and dominates the greater part of the Asian region. Initiatives to strengthen the bilateral relationship cannot focus only on attracting investment and trade but need to broaden an Indian constituency within Japan.

# Relating to the OIC

SYED SHAHABUDDIN

THE Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), established in 1969, has the character and framework of an Inter-Governmental Organization (IGO). Its membership is not universal – neither globally nor regionally – and spans a string of states, supposedly with a common Islamic character.

Though aiming at realizing the concept of Islamic solidarity, the OIC is not a religious organization or institution and has no authority to issue *fatwas* (religious edicts) binding on the Muslims, individually or collectively, in the member states or in the rest of the Muslim world. No Muslim state, nor the OIC today, performs the religious role of the Papacy. In any case the OIC does not enjoy any territorial sovereignty like the Vatican.

OIC membership is open to every Muslim state though the term is not defined. Beginning with 25 in Rabat, the OIC now has 54 members with the following regional break-up: West Asia 14; South Asia 5; Central Asia 6; South East Asia 3; North Africa 8; Central and South Africa 17; Europe 1.

Though the overwhelming majority of the OIC states are Muslim majority states but, surprisingly, some Muslim minority states have also been admitted as members. Most of these states are not Islamic states in the sense that their constitution does not recognize Islam as the religion of the state or that Islamic jurisprudence (*Shari'at*) is not the exclusive or primary source of legislation or that the headship of the state or of the government is not formally restricted to a person professing Islam.

The members of the OIC vary widely in area and population as well as in their per capita income. In area,

Kazakistan with 2.7 million square kms is the biggest, followed closely by Sudan with 2.5 msk. At the other end of the scale are states like Benin and Maldives with a few thousand square kilometers. Similarly, in population, according to the latest available figures, Indonesia leads with nearly 200 million while at the other end one finds a state with a population of few hundred thousand people. In terms of per capita income, at the top are oil-exporting countries with comparatively small populations.

The OIC functions on a relatively small budget which is largely funded by Saudi Arabia. Its headquarters in Jeddah does not show any sign of round-the-year activity. On the eve of the meetings of the General Assembly and other key organs of the United Nations, the OIC comes to life and tries to play a role in the international arena, particularly through consultations with UN organs as well as coordination among its members on the major issues of common interest.

In October 1982, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution establishing a regime of cooperation between the UNO and the OIC. The UN Secretary General since then has been presenting annual reports to the UNGA on cooperation between the two. The UNGA in its annual resolution takes note of the SG's report and conclusions and the recommendations adopted by the general meetings of the OIC with the various organizations and agencies of the UN system, requests the UN and OIC to continue their cooperation in the common search for solution to global problems including disarmament, self-determination and human rights and



welcomes the information exchange, coordination and consultation with a view to developing the modalities of the cooperation.

**B**y and large, the UNO-OIC cooperation appears to be an image building exercise for the benefit of the bureaucracies of both the organizations. Thus it does not add in any meaningful way to the commitment, allocation and contribution of the UN system to any OIC state. However, the expanding spectrum of cooperation *per se* shows the pressure that an IGO, which represents nearly 1/3 of the membership of the UN, can exert on the UN system and on its priorities. Additionally, in the case of small states, the consultation mechanism provides them some leverage to exact more from the UN system than would have been otherwise possible by their own efforts.

It may be noted that while all OIC states are members of the UNO, they are also members of various other international IGOs. For example, all African states are members of the OAU; all South East Asian states are members of the ASEAN; all South Asian states are members of SAARC; the Arab states are all members of the Arab League; and the Central Asian states are members of the CIS, the Commonwealth of Independent States. Nearly all of them belong to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77.

35% of the world Muslim population resides in Muslim minority states such as India, China, Russia, USA, France, UK, Germany and Bosnia which serve as major hosts within the cut-off limit of 1 million Muslims or 10% of the national population.

The OIC charter does not make any provision for an alternative form of association of Muslim majority states, which may not like to become full members, or of Muslim minority

states or of Muslim minority communities living in those states. However, some states like Cameroon and Nigeria, which were originally admitted as observers, later became full members. But Mozambique, a Muslim minority state, Northern Cyprus (a part of Cyprus under Turkish occupation which is recognized by Turkey as an independent state) and Zanzibar (an autonomous part of Tanzania) have been admitted as observers though the charter has no provision for observer status in respect of states or organizations or communities.

**F**rom time to time representatives of Muslim minority communities or of Muslim communities inhabiting a part of a Muslim minority state where they form a majority have participated as observers, for example, Arakan (Myanmar), Mindanao (Philippines), Kashmir (India), Chechnya (Russia), Bosnia (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Patani (Thailand) to the chagrin of some and the acquiescence of others. It may be noted that representatives of Muslim minority communities, denominational or linguistic or racial from OIC states, like the Kurds (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria), Sunnis (Iran) or Shias (Bahrain and Saudi Arabia) have never been invited or admitted nor have their problems or aspirations ever been addressed by the OIC.

One fails to comprehend the term 'Islamic solidarity' used in the charter, particularly whether it means solidarity among the Islamic states or extends to Muslim communities in non-Muslim states, and whether it commits the OIC collectively to support the latter on merits of the case. One thus senses in this term the potential of the OIC, collectively, and of the OIC states, individually, for interfering in the internal affairs of the Muslim minority states like India. It is, how-

ever, noticeable that apart from Palestine no other territorial problem like Kashmir, Mindanao, Arakan or Patani are specifically mentioned in the charter.

With reference to the principles enshrined in the OIC charter it may be argued that they apply only to interstate disputes among the OIC states and not to those between an OIC state and a non-member state. But the OIC will have scant logic on its side if it supports the violation of those principles by any OIC state or by itself in dealing with a non-member state and thus expose them to reciprocal interference by the other states. Similarly, if respect for the right of self-determination cannot be strategically applied to support secessionism or separatism in the OIC states, the OIC has to be extremely cautious in extending support to such movements in non-members states in the name of strengthening the struggle of the Muslim people for dignity, independence and national rights.

**T**here is thus a delicate balance between the natural desire of the OIC states to maintain their own sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and their pan-Islamic aspirations. It is significant that the word 'sovereignty' has not been used to define the objective of the struggle of the Muslim people. Sovereignty in the democratic age resides in the people, but the UN charter and several international documents use the term self-determination in a manner that connotes independence as its only possible manifestation. Above all, the fact that many OIC states face secessionist and separatist movements within their own domains perhaps acts as a restraint on the OIC extending support to such movements in the rest of the world.

Generally, the OIC has adopted a very low profile in dealing with the

problems of Muslim minorities. The secretariat has a department of Muslim minority affairs and since 1975 it has presented successive reports on Muslim minorities to the meetings of the foreign ministers. But apart from adopting long-winded resolutions, neither the meetings of the foreign ministers nor the Islamic summits have done anything to pursue the cause of the Muslim minorities. If the OIC has shown any interest, it was for the record but hard words break no bones. The OIC has never pledged itself to take any active role in any minority situation except in Mindanao which was taken up at the request of and with the consent of the government of the Philippines.

**O**ne factor behind such restraint, as exercised by the OIC, is no doubt its consciousness of the existence of many skeletons in its own cupboards of the existence of minority problems and separatist movements which many members have been facing and suppressing in a ruthless and sometimes brutal manner. Many OIC states have used state power not only against the secessionist and separatist elements but the radicals and the fundamentalist groups. Some OIC states have not hesitated to use their armed forces against their own people clamouring for democracy or autonomy or human rights.

The OIC resolutions and declarations should not be taken very seriously because individually its members do not subscribe to the same ideology or speak with one voice or adopt the same tone or are in a position to commit themselves operationally. A regional and near-global power like India can take such resolutions and declarations in its stride. But it need not take cover behind the outmoded concepts of national sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction. It can evade censure or

criticism if it explains its position on the questions in dispute and projects the sincere efforts it has been making to resolve them and to find durable solutions.

**S**ome OIC states see a messianic role for themselves. At one time or the other Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya and the Sudan have tried to don the mantle. Multiplicity of such claims itself sets up a mutual conflict of interests and leads to one claim being cancelled by the other. There is little reason to apprehend that at any given juncture all of them may gang up or back a holy crusade, a *jihad*, against India. One should not forget that even the frontline Arab states have not been able to coordinate their fire-power against a common enemy, Israel, which has been at the centre of their concern since the 1920s, though the liberation of Palestine forms the basic *raison d'être* and an explicit objective of the OIC.

To sum up, Muslim minorities have never figured on the priority agenda of the OIC. Its general approach has been to largely ignore the problems of Muslim minorities which constitute over one-third of the Muslim population of the world, treat them symbolically and play it cool. The department of Muslim minority affairs of the OIC secretariat has been sparsely funded and thinly staffed and its Muslim minority committee has been largely inactive. The OIC secretariat has no doubt presented successive reports on the question of Muslim communities in non-Muslim states to the meetings of the OIC foreign ministers who have regularly passed their long-winded resolutions almost with the same phraseology, slightly amended. But, the OIC general secretary or the secretariat has not pursued these resolutions with any commitment or purpose. The OIC has often

spoken for the record and has not adopted or pursued any active role in Muslim minority situations.

The Muslim states are not monolithic. Like the rest of the world they have faced a surge of ethnicity and the emergence of multiple identities within their domains, based on race, language or culture and spurred by geography, history or economics. In my view, the OIC is incapable of taking a coherent stand on the question of minorities, religious or otherwise, until and unless its member states come to terms with the non-Muslim or ethnic or sectarian Muslim minorities in their own domain and learn how to deal with border problems, created by trans-border ethnicities and the subsequent demand for self determination in accordance with internationally accepted norms.

**I**ndian policy toward the OIC has gone through a number of changes. It may be recalled that India was invited to the 1969 Rabat summit but it was forced out, or asked by the host Morocco to withdraw, to meet the objection of Pakistan. It is interesting to note that as an invitee to and participant in the Rabat summit, at least till it withdrew, India has a claim to membership of the OIC under its charter, though the membership is conditional upon accession to the charter after it was adopted in 1972.

Over the years India has built up bilateral diplomatic, economic, commercial and cultural relations with a number of OIC states, including all major players which are important to India from the point of view of bilateral trade or emigration of Indian labour.

The overall level of India's economic relations with the OIC countries is very low. Only with Turkey, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Nigeria, our export exceeds the annual level of

Rs 500 crore. One is particularly hopeful of bilateral economic relations with Pakistan and Bangladesh picking up with the coming into operation of SAFTA and overall improvement in political relations. From the point of view of imports into India, our major partners are Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and UAE. It will be seen that most of them are oil-exporting countries with the exception of Jordan which is a major supplier of phosphate rock for the fertilizer industry.

While Israel has emerged as a major investor in India, no OIC state has a comparable interest. It is, however, expected that Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Iran may enter the Indian economy in a big way in the foreseeable future. Conversely, India has very limited investment in the OIC states—largely located in Indonesia, Malaysia and UAE. From the point of view of manpower export Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar have emerged as major destinations.

**A**t present India has resident diplomatic missions in most of the OIC states, with the exception of Albania, Benin, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone and Somalia. Among these, India has accredited non-resident missions to Gabon, Guinea Bissau and Mali, India has consular representation in Djibouti and Sierra Leone.

In the global context India should establish diplomatic relations, at least through concurrent accreditation, with the remaining OIC states and also ask Bahrain to establish a resident mission in New Delhi. Later, India may establish a small resident mission in every OIC state consisting of an Ambassador or a C.d'A with a supporting home-based staff.

Since its bitter experience of 1969, India has tried to underplay the

OIC and even questioned its legitimacy by calling it a religious organization. Far from publicly endorsing the idea of any form of association or cooperation with the OIC, perhaps Indian policy-makers apprehend exploitation of the OIC by Pakistan and any other OIC state hostile to India. This is a genuine apprehension as the OIC is based on the concept of 'Islamic solidarity' and is seen likely to show sympathy for the Muslim side in any internal issue or external conflict of interest with a non-Muslim state.

**T**he bitter pill which India had to swallow in Rabat in 1969 due to the insistence by Pakistan and the acquiescence of the host, Morocco, has thus made India very sensitive on the question of association or cooperation with the OIC. For one thing, India has consistently resisted the idea that questions of national importance like the status of Jammu and Kashmir and the treatment of the Muslim Indian community may be discussed in any international forum. This applies much more to the OIC.

There have, however, been some informal consultations between the Government of India and the OIC secretariat through its missions in Riyadh and Jeddah or through visiting secretaries. But India has so far abstained from establishing any permanent machinery for maintaining regular contacts with the OIC. The OIC has on several occasions expressed a desire to send special missions, particularly to study the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, but the Government of India has formally rebuffed such overtures.

The question whether India should seek membership or observer status with the OIC has long been under consideration. The Government of India presumably feels that with its extensive contacts with the major OIC

states, as well as with its global connections, it can successfully deal with any interference or intervention by the OIC as an institution in Jammu and Kashmir or in the situation of the Muslim Indian community.

The Government of India also feels that other multilateral fora such as the Arab League, the OAU, ASEAN and, above all, SAARC, the NAM and the Group of 77, of which India is itself a member, can provide fora for informally restraining the OIC from taking undue interest. Since India aspires to play a key role in evolving, formulating and projecting the common policies of the non-aligned and the developing world on global issues, this role may restrain even those OIC states which nurse sympathy for Pakistan's claim on Jammu and Kashmir or for the right of the people of Jammu and Kashmir to self-determination or a sense of solidarity with the Muslim Indians.

**P**erceiving the Muslim world as a house divided between the progressive, secular and democratic forces on one side, and the orthodox, religious and anti-democratic forces on the other, from time to time India has publicly aligned itself with one and against the other, chosen to be friendly towards the first and cool, sometimes critical, towards the other. These feelings were naturally reciprocated. These defining lines have not stood the test of time and our policy of discrimination has proved to be counter-productive in developing relations with some of those countries.

During the heyday of Nasserism, India became associated with pro-Nasserism and, by definition, hostile to those states which stood against Nasser. One may question whether this did not amount to intervention in an essentially intra-Arab and intra-Muslim conflict and in the long run did

not damage our national interest. In any case India had no power—military or economic—to push the Arab or the Muslim world in any desired direction. It never had any real option but to deal with the Arab Muslim states as they were, irrespective of the ideological complexion of the ruling elite or the relations among themselves.

**I**t may also be kept in view that such family disputes have a way of being resolved through consensus or compromise often leaving the committed sympathizers high and dry on the sidelines, e.g., in the post-Nasser era in the Arab world. Thus while the Arab-Islamic world has become increasingly important to India in a strategic sense, Indian diplomacy has failed to evolve a matching sophistication. Sometimes it looked as if in a raging sea Indian diplomacy had become an anchorless ship, with no safe port-of-call within sight and no pilots familiar with local navigational hazards.

India thus began on a wrong note by delineating the OIC as a religious organization which OIC was not and was not intended to be and by taking sides in Arab and Muslim politics. India should have recognized that it was a political organization, an inter-state forum, and an IGO. India also looked upon the OIC as dominated by a conglomerate of the orthodox, anti-secular, anti-democratic and even feudal states in the Muslim world which the OIC was not. It was a joint enterprise of a large number of states which shared a common Islamic ethos deriving comfort and seeking support from each other in their dealing with internal and external challenges.

The pan-Islamic consciousness, to the extent that it existed, was directed against communist and colonial pressures. Its development and discourse had a progressive nuance, which Indian policy-makers had

missed. By raising its collective voice for national rights against neo-colonial exploitation, particularly in relation to the non-renewable natural resources, by projecting Islam as a force against imperialism and communism and as compatible with science and technology, democracy and human rights, the OIC states have participated in the larger battles of the Third World against both the capitalist and communist faces of the West and in the movement towards modernization.

**T**he Indian policy-makers should also have realized that the pan-Islamic consciousness or solidarity largely operated at a sentimental or emotional level, that it amounted to no more than what is called *ummah* consciousness and that the OIC states, individually or collectively, were in no position to intervene in situations of Muslim separatism or militancy anywhere, except with the goodwill and consent of the state concerned as in the case of Philippines and Thailand, to help resolve the conflicts. On the other hand, ideological states like Libya, Iran and Iraq and now Sudan, did whatever they wished to do in the Muslim world and outside, but outside the framework of the OIC and not through it.

In the final analysis, India's policy-makers appear to have exaggerated the threat of exploitation of the OIC by Pakistan in its territorial designs over Jammu and Kashmir and over the treatment of Muslim Indians and this has determined the Indian response.

No state in the modern world can take the position that a problem does not exist or that the world should overlook it. It cannot attribute its own mistakes, failures and weaknesses as an illusion or a figment of imagination or attribute them to subversion and

denigration by its rivals or adversaries. India has indeed never taken a position that minority problems or problems with Pakistan do not exist except in Pakistan's imagination or in the mind of those who are out to subvert and denigrate the Indian state.

India should have realised that the member-states of the OIC which have large non-Muslim minorities themselves and face separatist or secessionist movements, which have border disputes with their neighbours, which are distant from South Asia, which have economic or historic ties with India, which seek international support to a cause of primary concern to them, which have a large Indian expatriate community, cannot and will not adopt an anti-Indian stance. Even, some of these states with special ties with Pakistan such as Turkey, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran and even those smaller states to which Pakistan offers special favours or to which it pays special attention may not fall in line, as they may prefer to remain silent or neutral within the OIC, on a balance of considerations.

**T**he OIC, therefore, may pass a formal resolution or adopt a formal declaration but its members do not speak with one voice or in one idiom or with the same tone or emphasis on issues which are not of direct interest to them. One may think that on India's entry, bilateral problems with Pakistan would become intra-OIC in character and the OIC has traditionally been less vocal and demonstrative on intra-OIC problems. A strong state like India can take such resolutions and declarations in its stride but it can also do with an opportunity to gain support and understanding by explaining its position on internal problems that exist, as they do in any country, in terms of the sincere efforts the Indian state has made to resolve them and find durable

solutions and thus appeal to the understanding of those within the OIC who face similar problems.

**O**n the other hand, some states with bilateral problems with their neighbours, e.g. Pakistan and Turkey, could try to use the forum to mobilise support for their national causes, particularly from some small OIC states and court them with special favours or gestures. But even they may prefer to remain silent.

India may adopt a multi-pronged approach and build up its weight and credibility not only in the OIC states but all over the world by setting its own house in order, practising what it preaches, defending the secular order against internal subversion, ideological or majoritarian, protecting minority rights in accordance with its own Constitution and international documents to which it is a party, curbing anti-Muslim violence and anti-Islamic propaganda, coming to terms with Kashmiriyat by granting autonomy, short of sovereignty, to the Valley and establishing a regime of peace and progress in the benighted state.

Counselling OIC on common problems of international concern, taking their common concerns into account in determining Indian policies, within the NAM, the Group of 77, developing political, economic, cultural and technical cooperation with each OIC state without any ideological differentiation, seeking observer status with the OIC (but refusing membership, even if offered), establishing a permanent representation to the OIC for regular interaction and, if desired by the OIC, permit it to set up a representation in India (as in the case of the PLO and the Arab League) and receiving OIC missions to India, as in the case of the EU, as well as developing mutually beneficial relations

with the established institutions and organizations of the OIC in the field of education, culture, development, information, language, science and technology, projecting India's Islamic face and using eminent Muslim Indians, officially and unofficially, as bridges to the Muslim world, India can successfully counter the element of hostility in its interaction with the OIC and even isolate Pakistan, the prime mover, if it persists.

**I**ndia should also seek to strengthen and expand relations with Pakistan, and promote cooperation within the framework of the SAARC.

\*India should, therefore, give serious consideration to evolve a mutually compatible form of association. It should refuse membership of the OIC even if offered, in order not to provoke Hindu reaction in India, but should express its inclination to accept the status of permanent observer in the OIC and to accredit a permanent representative to the OIC, if the OIC charter is suitably amended to admit non-Muslim majority states with a substantial Muslim minority of, say, over 10% of the national population and/or exceeding one million.

\*India should seek to establish continuous interaction with the OIC at least informally till India is admitted as observer. This would open the door for OIC missions to visit India and have regular exchange of views at official and non-official levels. The foreign office should brief OIC ambassadors in Delhi regularly on matters of concern to the OIC relating to India or otherwise, consult OIC formally on matters of international concern in determining Indian policies such as questions on the agenda of the NAM, Group of 77 and even the Group of 15.

\*India should also develop constructive and cooperative relations with specialized institutions and organiza-

tions of the OIC particularly in the field of education, culture, language and law and give them access to the Muslim community and Muslim organizations in India.

\*India should deal with and develop political, economic, cultural and technical cooperation with every OIC state without any ideological differentiation. But it should identify OIC states with special ties to Pakistan and develop matching relations with them, man for man and rupee for rupee.

India must realize that the Muslim world is neither monolithic nor homogeneous. In fact, few Muslim states are even racially or denominationally homogeneous. The Muslim world is also facing the same surge of ethnicity and of identity, based on sect, race, language and culture, spurred by geography, history and economics, as the rest of the world. The OIC, an inter-governmental organization, all of whose members are committed to their existing boundaries is incapable of taking a coherent stand on this supreme political question of the 21st century, the question of ethnicity. The OIC states simply do not know how to deal with such situations and the consequent trans-border movements when ethnicity either transcends national boundaries or experiences claustrophobia.

**T**he OIC will definitely survive into the 21st century but its state of health, vigour and vitality and its impact in the international arena will depend on the interest of the major Muslim majority states in using it, individually as well as collectively, for evolving a coherent consensus in dealing with each other or with other non-member states or with the international community and taking a constructive stand in the deliberations of other inter-governmental organizations on international situations.

# New pathways

RAJEN HARSHE

INTERNATIONAL relations after the Cold War are increasingly perceived and interpreted in the broader context of globalization. The term globalization, most often, is deployed in the current discourses in international relations to capture a panoramic view of growing and complex forms of interdependence, symmetrical as well as asymmetrical, in a unifying world. Thus, internationalization of multiple set of activities has to inevitably precede globalization. The latter, by definition, promotes free flow of ideas, information, goods, services, capital, values, arms, technology and images across national frontiers on a world scale.

The patterns of integration unleashed under globalization are likely to continuously increase, widen and deepen in the coming decades. Evidently it is rather difficult to visualize, with some measure of accuracy, the implications of a constantly unfolding phenomenon such as globalization on international relations at this stage. However, it is feasible to identify a few major and durable trends. This article is a modest attempt to identify such trends in order to search new pathways for India to meet the challenges

of globalization. We begin by analyzing the advent of capitalism and its association with globalization.

The accentuation of the phase of globalization coincided with the emergence of capitalism as the most dominant mode of development after the Cold War. In fact, by the early nineties, most of the East European countries from the former socialist bloc and the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that succeeded the Soviet Union, opted to pursue capitalist development. A number of Third World countries like Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia almost abandoned their socialist experiments in favour of capitalism. What is more, even China embraced a variant of capitalism through its conscious policy of bolstering an alternative of market socialism. In a word, since the last decade of this century, capitalism blossomed as a mode of development and as a world system.<sup>1</sup>

1. It is difficult to arrive at a neat definition of the term capitalism. However, as a resilient system, capitalism can be broadly identified with the following realities: (a) private/corporate ownership of the means of production, (b) growth and development of wage labour,

Although the process of globalization cannot be reduced to capitalism, the relationship between capitalism and globalization is inextricably intertwined. Capitalism certainly is a vehicle to promote globalization and *vice versa*. Obviously, the process of globalization would subsume combined and uneven development of different regions, nations, states and social classes because this phenomenon is rooted in the logic and parameters of capitalist development. In the advanced capitalist countries of the West, the process of uneven development has more often been accompanied by an uncanny flexibility of capitalism to accommodate egalitarian pressures generated by diverse protest movements.

**A**part from a wide range of anti-systemic and left oriented forces from the outside, capitalism has its critics from within as well. For instance, George Soros, an international financial magnet, in his trenchant critique of post-Cold War capitalism has underscored the nature of capitalist threat to any open society. This threat can manifest itself, rather glaringly, in the capacity of capitalism to promote excessive individualism leading towards intolerable social disparities and unbridled exploitation of the masses.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to its opponents from diverse quarters, capitalism has acquired the resilience to adapt itself to changing conditions and displays an intrinsic ability to outmanoeuvre competing ideologies and coopt its most radical opponents. Obviously, it has an enormous staying power that has consistently sustained its potential

(c) relationship between wage labour and capital characterized by a melange of conflict and cooperation and, (d) an in-built drive to stimulate the process of accumulation and reproduction of capital.

2. George Soros, 'The Capitalist Threat', *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1997, pp. 45-58.

to operate on a global scale. In the light of these observations it is possible to discern certain major trends in international relations under globalization as follows.

**T**he impact of the process of globalization could be appraised at three different levels, i.e. global, regional and state. Admittedly, these levels are interconnected – the dividing lines between them being drawn for sheer analytical convenience. At the global level, globalization is likely to force a multiplicity of social organizations across nations, states, civilizations and continents to coexist in a compressed space. In essence, globalization would eventually build the world into a single space by constructing diverse patterns of social relations across distances. Such togetherness, in its turn, would be pregnant with the possibilities of varying and complex forms of multilateral cooperation as well as conflict.

For instance, new forms of cooperation are already conspicuous through the operations of transnational conglomerates which coordinate their activities across states. The main strength of these gigantic organizations can be perceived in the growing significance of intra-firm trade. The functioning of transnational firms has been facilitated by financial deregulation which in turn has stimulated the flow of foreign direct investments (FDI) on the one hand, and mobilization of capital and currency and capital markets on an unprecedented scale, on the other.

The phase of globalization as it unfolds would also witness the rise of transnational regimes and movements. Some of the existing transnational regimes such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the nuclear regime

upholding the banner of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) are already operating in full swing.

In general, the growth of transnational regimes would be accompanied by the proliferation of transnational movements. The latter would primarily be shaped by the growing strength of inter-societal networks across the world. Such networks would pave the way for the emergence of international or global civil society that would obviously function without a global state. In fact, issues like the protection of human rights and environment, prevention of child labour, women's emancipation, poverty alleviation, and prevention of cross-border terrorism as well as internationalization of crime are already binding people the world over in rudimentary forms of transnational movements.

**T**he phase of globalization, paradoxically, is witnessing the growth of regionalism and the consequent advent of regional organizations. The old regional organizations are being adapted to new conditions while new ones are getting formed. Evidently, the response to globalization at the regional level can be well appraised by understanding the nature and functioning of diverse regional organizations all over the world. Any worthwhile analysis of the functioning of organizations like the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) amply illustrates this proposition.

What is more, apart from promoting cooperation in economic, commercial and politico-strategic spheres, the states are also promoting

transnational religio-cultural organizations. The predominant role of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) in West Asian and international affairs is a case in point.

**F**inally, the contemporary state is witnessing existential strains under globalization. The paradoxical predicament of the state could be placed thus: On the one hand, the state is the main agency through which agreements towards the promotion of transnational regimes and regional organizations are being worked out. On the other, the transnational regimes and organizations almost carry the mandate through these agreements to circumscribe the powers of the state to ensure their smooth functioning. Thus, organizations functioning at the global or regional levels do and will continue to impinge on state sovereignty from above.

In addition, the state faces the challenge from intra-state conflicts from below. The rise of secessionist movements based on ethnic nationalism in states including Sri Lanka, Iraq, Iran, Canada, India, and Rwanda are cases in point. Similarly, the advent of Islam has disturbed the internal harmony of states within the entire Muslim world. Most separatist or religious movements have internationalized their struggles.

In substance, such struggles have offered space to local and international forces to converge. Therefore, the growing significance of sub-national and transnational forces coupled with their alliances under diverse conditions and of different magnitudes, can cumulatively undermine the pre-eminent role of the state in international relations. Evidently, the distinctions between what could be termed as internal – within the state boundaries – and external – outside the state boundaries – are inevitably

getting blurred in these processes. In view of these trends, we can proceed to examine how India's foreign policy could meet these challenges under globalization.

India has already started to entertain a vibrant and interactive relationship with the main trends under globalization. Such interactive involvement allows it to reorient its developmental alternatives as well as foreign policy. Carving out an imaginative development strategy in the context of globalization is perhaps the major challenge before India. A combination of certain compelling domestic as well as international factors virtually drove India to meet this challenge by initiating the process of reforms in 1991.

**F**or instance, certain domestic factors like the dismal performance of a large number of public sector units, depleting foreign exchange reserves leading to a balance of payments deficit and growing cynicism about the inefficacy of any socialist order had brought the Indian economy to the brink of disaster. Moreover, with the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, India lost a dependable ally. For, India had consistently consolidated its mutually beneficial politico-strategic, economic and military ties with the Soviet Union over three decades.

In the light of its malfunctioning economy as well as the demise of the Soviet Union, India opted to revive its economy through reforms. Such reforms entailed various measures of liberalization and the consequent rolling back of the role of the state in the economy. Moreover, the reforms had to be made acceptable across a wide spectrum of political parties through consensus building in a democratic polity. The Rao regime straddled this path quite admirably. By now, practi-

cally all the major political parties are willing to encourage private initiative in business, contemplate closure of the sick public sector units and take appropriate measures to liberalize the Indian economy to encounter the phase of globalization.

What is more, the state in India could deal quite effectively with international regimes like the IMF and the World Bank while undergoing the initial years of the phase of reforms. In a word, India, by now, is poised to evolve its own form of welfare capitalism in a world that has been almost eclipsed by capitalism as the major development paradigm.

Admittedly, India is entering the phase of globalization without preparing for it. For instance, certain glaring social realities such as neglect of primary education, health care, socio-economic inequalities, including gender inequalities and the virtual absence of land reforms on a significant scale are likely to have adverse impact on India's performance while it navigates through this phase. Despite these handicaps, India can rise to the occasion by using the opportunities thrown up to its advantage by searching the new pathways in the following manner.

**A**t the global level India can evolve several ways to ensure its effective survival under globalization. To begin with, there is a growing trend to establish large regional markets. Such markets are being built through inter-state collaborations. Organizations like the EU, NAFTA and ASEAN amply illustrate this proposition. However, unlike these organizations, India constitutes a large market in itself. Hence it could effectively relate to this global trend by constituting a single market out of several fragmented regional markets. If a sub-continent wide regional market can be formed in India by abolish-



ing tariff and non-tariff barriers among states, India could emerge as a powerful country.

Experts on business like Prakash Hebalkar have strongly advocated the establishment of a national trade commission to attain this goal.<sup>3</sup> For, without internal single market India will not be able to build a world class home market. Among the Third World countries, India has the potential to become a world scale market. By building its emerging market on a world scale, India can open up its economy to new products and services. Thus, Indian consumers can also access advanced products and services at low prices which can generate new jobs as well.

**F**urther, the upgrading of the Indian market to products and services would imply gaining access to new technologies and attracting investments from industrialized countries. The transnational firms are likely to be catalysts in providing new technologies and investments. Evidently, their role in terms of diverse domains, including joint ventures or participation in manufacturing products and building services in India, will have to be worked out in greater detail.

Furthermore, in a rapidly shrinking world India needs to step up its exports and recast its trade relations as a whole. In the sphere of export promotion India can concentrate on the export of services where it has distinct advantage due to sheer size of its trained manpower. For instance, well over a million professionals of Indian origin have played a pivotal role in the economies of the advanced industrialized countries. The trained manpower in India could as well be deployed to promote developmental goals of the developing countries by

initiating collaborative arrangements with a number of Afro-Asian countries. Unfortunately, India has yet to utilize its full potential in the service sector. India's trade and commercial ties, in general, need to be reoriented in the post Cold War world. In the process of forging such ties India will have to conceive a mix of change and continuity in its external policy. To put it tersely, forging and consolidating economic and commercial ties with post-Soviet Russia and the process of wooing the new regional markets like the EU will have to go hand in hand. The ties with the former are already being set on the rails by Indo-Russian joint working groups. Promoting substantive links with the EU countries would demand more proactive diplomacy backed by sound research in the economic and commercial spheres.

**H**owever, improving the prospects of economic and commercial ties with the external world is inconceivable without developing an integrated ocean policy. India's foreign policy, at this juncture, must have a well thought out maritime perspective. Indeed, in the light of the growing role of extra-regional powers in the Indian Ocean, a considerable rethinking is required about India's strategic frontiers. Strategic frontiers, according to Vishnu Bhagwat, define a nation's interests on considerations of geo-politics, geo-strategy and geo-economics.

India will have to give up its obsession with immediate territorial boundaries and take an overall view of strategic frontiers to safeguard its core interests.<sup>4</sup> India's strategic frontiers cover almost all the significant regions of the Indian Ocean such as West Asia, (including the Persian Gulf), the Red Sea, the western littorals and the Pacific upto the South

China Sea. These strategic naval frontiers, in their turn, are going to influence the course of India's trade.

**T**he promotion of trade and commercial ties with other countries is feasible only by boosting the energy security of the productive units. In order to bolster its energy security India will have to import oil, gas and downstream products from either the Gulf states or other diversified sources like the Central Asian and African states. This would involve planned preparation for sea transportation. Conscious efforts to promote friendly ties with countries like Iran that are located in the global energy heartland would go a long way in protecting India's long term economic and strategic interests.

Iran is only 500 miles away from India by the sea route. As a gateway to Central Asia, friendship with Iran will help India in gaining access to Central Asian resources as well as markets. Moreover, there is a striking convergence of interests between India and Iran about handling Pakistan sponsored terrorism. Pakistan's alleged support to Taliban in Afghanistan and the activities of Taliban backed militants in Kashmir have adversely affected the security interests of both countries. Under these circumstances, India and Iran can build new bonds in their pursuit of fighting cross-border terrorism.

Like Iran, post-apartheid South Africa with its key mineral resources, size of market and strategic location on the Indian Ocean is another major country with which India needs to build an economic partnership. In fact trade between the two countries has already increased. In substance, the Indian Ocean region, its littoral states and their capacities to generate resources would determine India's economic performance. Hence, the proposal to build an integrated policy

3. Prakash Hebalkar, 'Open up the internal market', *Business India*, 8-21 November 1993, pp. 149-50.

4. See the interview with Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat in *The Hindu*, 2 October 1998.

towards the Indian Ocean, accepted by the prime minister in 1997, needs to be immediately implemented. Such a policy would provide a viable basis to invest in the navy.

In addition to a maritime perspective, India, as a pioneer member of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) can take the initiative in mobilizing NAM as a forum to promote the developmental objectives of member countries. Admittedly NAM is far from being a homogeneous entity, yet it can tackle some of the common economic problems of its members. For instance, problems such as the stabilization of prices of primary commodities, the transfer of technologies, credit, loans and aid to developing countries on favorable terms, and the prevention of environmental degradation in the Third World could be handled if NAM members make a concerted effort to resolve them.

**T**he NAM has to acquire an economic orientation to provide space for the initiation of a North-South dialogue as well as South-South cooperation. After the Pretoria summit of 1998 NAM is gradually acquiring an economic thrust. By being an active participant in NAM, India would not merely strengthen such forums but gain support of its members, in turn, to deal with major powers, forces and international regimes.

In tune with these policies at the global level, India can respond to the process of globalization at the regional level. In fact, India's policy towards its South Asian neighbours has a two-fold relevance. First, any worthwhile project of promoting regional cooperation is inconceivable without India's active participation because South Asia is predominantly an Indo-centric region. Second, as a corollary, it is only by consolidating cooperative ties with its neighbours

that India can contain secessionist movements, cross-border terrorism and diverse range of intra-state conflicts within its frontiers.

**T**he Gujral doctrine which believed in following a policy of non reciprocity towards the neighbouring states proved to be a good device in furthering a cooperative ambience in South Asia. Certain important developments between 1996-98, such as the 30 year treaty between India and Bangladesh over the sharing of Ganga waters, the Mahakali river treaty between India and Nepal and India's initiative to support road links between Nepal and Bangladesh illustrate this. Furthermore, India took constructive measures to promote intra-regional trade by supporting the idea of a South Asian Preferential Trade Area (SAPTA). It offered concessions on 500 consumer goods to the least developed countries and thereby supported countries like Bangladesh in their trade ventures. India also signed an investment protection and promotion agreement with Sri Lanka in January 1997.

Apart from offering financial assistance to Sri Lanka to rectify its trade imbalance, the Gujral regime unilaterally reduced tariff and removed all non-tariff barriers on 70-80 products exported from Sri Lanka to India. In line with the Gujral doctrine, India took the bold step of removing quantitative restrictions on 2000 commodities to promote SAPTA during the July 1998 summit of SAARC held in Colombo.

Although trade and cooperation among the South Asian countries is almost negligible compared to regional organizations in the developed countries, it is with the growing networks of cooperative ties that South Asian countries can tackle their developmental goals. However, organizations like SAARC are constrained to

function under the shadow of a conflictive relationship between India and Pakistan.

Indeed, Kashmir continues to be a perennial bone of contention between India and Pakistan. In order to gain possession of Kashmir, Pakistan has resorted to sponsoring cross border terrorism, mobilizing international forums and striking a military rapport with powerful states like the US and China. India, in turn, is bent on defending its control over the strategically important state of Kashmir while serving its vital national interests.

**B**ut in the process of controlling the flow of drugs and arms, as also the activities of the terrorist outfits in Kashmir, India is constrained to deploy its scarce resources for security purposes. In fact, India had to constantly counter the challenge of secessionism in the North-East, Punjab and Kashmir since the eighties. The gravity of such secessionist threats could be minimized through dialogue with Pakistan on the one hand, and by initiating diverse cooperative ventures between India and its neighbours, especially Pakistan, on the other.

To conclude, India can encounter the phase of globalization by constantly consolidating the phase of reforms and promoting trade related growth. This would subsume a revival of the relationship with Russia as well as forging of new ties with emerging regional organizations like the EU. Also, an integrated policy towards the Indian Ocean would help India build new economic partnerships apart from bolstering its energy security. However, it needs to be underlined that in order to deal with international relations under globalization more effectively, India will have to undertake initiatives to enhance the prospects of South Asian regional cooperation.

# Evolving consensus

I.K. Gujral interviewed by Nandan Unnikrishnan

*In a recent lecture you spoke of a need for a paradigm shift in development strategies among Asian countries, about the distribution of resources and noted that several leaders stressed that development has been vertical and not horizontal.*

There was an interesting meeting convened by the UNDP in South Korea. Thirty nations participated from Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Interestingly, this is an area largely in the grip of an economic recession. Be it Thailand, Korea, Malaysia or Indonesia, you can even include Japan in that and then jump over to Russia, you find a new situation. Why is it happening? For quite some time now the World Bank and the IMF have been formulating policies and advocating the concept of globalisation. Almost every party, every country, has been pushed into that paradigm. The results have caused concern; even the President of the World Bank has now said that it needs rethinking.

The main issue before us is what we mean by development. Until now we have been made to believe that GDP and growth rates determine everything. It goes to the credit of UNDP that for a few years now it has been focusing on human development and therefore has been talking of different paradigms – poverty alleviation, school education, housing, availability of drinking water and so on. A consensus prevails that the course we have been following is not conducive to the general well-being or happiness of the people as a whole. I know that it is not easy to move away from the free market paradigm because of vested interests to whom the market is both king and god.

*You just mentioned globalisation as an issue that has dominated the discussions of the past decade. But the problem we face is that the priorities for India or Malaysia, Central Asia or Eastern Europe may be different. How do you make all this homogenous?*

No, priorities are not different, that's the point. The reverse is true. The IMF and the World Bank have been trying to harmonise that and they have instru-

ments for doing it. But every country has a different ethos, every country faces different social situations. So, therefore, let's not try to harmonise. Let us try to understand and make policies and instead cut the cloth according to our needs, not ask the bodies to fit into the coat.

*How do you see India fitting into this concept of globalisation and where do we go from here?*

I'll go slightly beyond India. When the World Bank and IMF were set up, the general idea was that they would be instruments for the transfer of resources from the developed to the developing countries. It is now beyond doubt that the reverse is happening. The moment you free the market, the moment you open up the transfer of resources, you suddenly find money moving out. Japan is witnessing the same thing now. If India has to an extent been saved, it is because of our conservative outlook and our cautiousness. I'm not saying we should not modernize our economy; I am all for it. At the same time I think we did the right thing by not opening up capital account convertibility, although there has been immense pressure for doing so.

Similarly, when you globalise your stock exchange market. On the face of it, it looks attractive because people come and buy shares. They don't buy shares because they want to help you, they buy shares because the market rises. But the moment the market falls they are the first to sell and get out. The money goes out because we do not have a cooling period.

*But in what direction? What do you think should be done? Should we pull away from globalisation?*

Kindly keep one thing in mind. It is not whether we should do this or that; we must put our heads together, first internally. What is the social scene? What is happening to the poverty sector? After 50 years of freedom, we have to ask ourselves this question. Of course, we are happy that we have been able to create a sizeable middle class. Its estimates vary – some people think that 30-35% of the population has entered the middle class. It's a wonderful thing. And I hear that with

joy. At the same time, any responsible person has to think of those 60-65% people who are not a part of the middle class. How do we transport them into the middle class? And now an estimate is also being made about how many people in India are still left in destitution, not poverty. I mean, I draw a line between destitution and poverty.

Another thing is that the middle class is a very good institution. Generally it helps stabilize society. But one also has to guard against the risks and the danger that it corners the entire benefits. If more money is spent on car manufacturing, less is spent on mass transport. These are the difficulties that we are confronted with. The present situation or the present working system of globalisation has not given all-round satisfaction.

*Is there a breakdown of consensus on foreign policy in India?*

The issue is basically related to the nuclear tests. Just this morning we had a meeting of the consultative committee with the prime minister in the chair. This question was raised and it links with, for instance, my refusal to sign the CTBT. What did I do at that time? Before going public I consulted every political party, and not just once. As the debate progressed the world over, the present prime minister was consulted more often than anybody else. Not only did I consult formally, I shared documents with him and on quite a few occasions I modified my stance to carry the nation with me.

Let us forget for a minute whether the present nuclear policy is good or bad. That can be examined separately but I think if you recall the last parliamentary debate, it was clear that the entire nation was not going along with it. It was a matter of concern. It is a matter of concern that no effort is being made even now. Why is it not done? My general suspicion is that party credit is more important than national credit. Once you get into that mode of thinking, then difficulties arise. Every foreign policy is the foreign policy of a nation and not of a party. Second, if you take an attitude that foreign policy is predominantly the policy of a party then after a few years your policy may change. Continuity will collapse, and if I may put it squarely, neither your friends nor your foes will know when you are going to change your stance.

India's strength has been one of continuity and this has been achieved because of consensus. Jawaharlal Nehru must be given credit for this. You may recall that in his days every public meeting, be it in a village or in town, would be conducted by him as a

study circle. That was a legacy from the freedom struggle itself, because the freedom struggle had left a legacy of consensus. Once we part from that the nation will become weaker and not stronger.

*Now that the nuclear tests have been conducted, what should be done?*

Talks are going on between the government and the Americans but they are covered in a shroud of silence. One does not know what they are discussing. I can understand they cannot make it public. But I cannot understand why they do not tell anyone of us. Even when the tests were conducted, I am not saying it as a complaint, though I was in charge a couple of weeks earlier, I learnt about it on TV. They didn't even have the courtesy of informing us, leave alone sharing it. I can understand you cannot tell before the test. I see no reason why the PM did not share the information after the tests. Everywhere I have said, let us not discuss the tests, let us discuss nuclear policy because, after all, the test is a child of a nuclear policy. Why did India have to do it? We all know the answer and in all humility, I think the government of India is sleeping.

*Well, there is another problem and that is the economic recession in the country. Do you think this in any sense is affecting our diplomatic manoeuvrability at this stage when we are engaged in talks with the United States and have restarted negotiations with Pakistan on several issues?*

The main point is that there is, to an extent, resistance to talks from outside. Only last week I was in Tokyo. Ever since the tests the Japanese government has refused to talk to India. I think I was the first Indian whom their PM, foreign minister and finance minister met. That was breaking of the ice. This wasn't a compliment to me. Therefore, I wouldn't try to present it that way. But I think effort has to be made, preferably by enlarging the track two approach, so that you are able to talk to the people, the newspapers, the editors, to go out and talk to politicians. The difficulty of the present situation is that the government of India has not tried to create a consensus here. The manpower at its disposal is limited. It only wants to send two or three persons who are in its close circle. I have all respect for them. But the effectiveness gets reduced. Therefore, there are not many people in India, who really know, on a personal basis, many people outside.

*Isn't that also true of most governments? To an extent is this not part of the system of political patronage?*

No, it is not political patronage. When I requested A.B. Vajpayee to go to every UN session, or when Narasimha Rao sent him to the human rights conference or when Narasimha Rao sent me to various places, we were presenting the united face of India. That is how India should work; that has been India's style.

*Well, talking of presenting a united face to the world, we saw the Gujral doctrine at work in the neighbourhood during your time as foreign minister and subsequently as PM. The BJP came into power and appears to be moving away from that policy. Recently, the talks have restarted between India and Pakistan. Do you anticipate substantial progress in this process?*

The Gujral doctrine that you talk of—remove my name from it if it bothers you—was a neighbourhood policy of the post-Cold War era when India has to think in terms of the region. Every major country is thinking in terms of its region—the European Union or ASEAN. Only after making a place in this region first can we really take off. So my neighbourhood policy, like every foreign policy, had self-interest in mind. India can play a big role in the world, if our neighbours go with us, and they were earlier. Of course, there was some difficulty with Bangladesh for 30 years, but we were able to resolve it. So also with Nepal: We were able to win back the confidence of Sri Lanka, and we had broken ice with Pakistan.

I don't say we had arrived somewhere. The long history of India and Pakistan is full of difficulties. We must not expect quick results. I am happy that we are talking to each other. This by itself is a good thing. And therefore, whether this round succeeds, or the next round succeeds, or whether the 20th round succeeds, we must go on talking patiently. India-Pakistan relations will never be an event, they are more a process.

*How do you see our relations with the US and China?*

China is our neighbour, so let me start with that. We had some difficulties with China. The '62 war and all that... I think we have once again engaged each other. After several rounds of talks, our borders are now more tranquil than in the past. We both have reduced our arms strength on the borders. Of late, after the tests, there have been some difficulties, but I hope we will quickly get over them.

You see, two things can never be changed: neither history nor geography. We are neighbours for all times to come. And therefore we can be of help to each other. There are several things which are positive in China, their rate of growth has been much faster than

ours. But there are several things that are strong in India. The participation of the people, the entrepreneurial class which we call the middle class. These are very strong points for us. I think we will quickly get over this hiccup in India-China relations and find the same path on which we were proceeding. As for Pakistan, I don't think anybody in Pakistan believes that animosity with India is good for them. Nor do we. I think people have better sense, and given their faith in the region, SAARC is a very important institution for the future. I think our relations with Pakistan and other neighbours will improve a great deal as we lay greater emphasis on SAARC.

*Sir, you mentioned China and Pakistan, but what about the United States—how do you see our relationship today?*

Our relationship with the United States had improved in the past. There have been some difficulties on nuclear policy. But I think that we both understand each other's dilemmas.

*Do you think we will succeed in persuading the world to adjust to a nuclear India?*

Yes, provided we persist with what we are saying and what we are saying is that we want a de-nuclearised world, we want no nuclear weapons anywhere and we believe that. We must also say and repeat that we do not want proliferation. Proliferation has been done by those who've signed the NPT, not by us. India's record on that has been very good. Never hesitate from getting into discussions and conferences. The world is willing to listen.

*What do you think is the most significant event of 1998 and what do you think is the most important priority for India, as also for the world, in 1999?*

1999 will be the threshold of the next millennium. When we met in Korea, the agenda was how do we view the next millennium. I will not repeat what I've already told you. So we said let us do two things from here. One, call a similar meeting of all the political parties and state chief ministers as also all the leaders to find a shared view of the next millennium. Second, in May next year, we will receive the report on human development in South Asia. We've all agreed that a conference of South Asian countries be called to unitedly spell a vision for the new millennium. When we have to carry a nation with us then this is the only way, that together we spell out our vision. We all have our own views, but let us state them openly and see what comes of it.

# Framework for the future

SATISH KUMAR

INDIA, after 50 years of independence and despite acquiring the status of a *de facto* nuclear weapon state, cannot claim to be a power of any consequence. Its achievements have not had their due impact. Much of the explanation lies in a lack of requisite economic growth, social disunity and political instability. But the absence of an imaginative leadership and lack of a structure of decision-making based on essential inputs and expertise also accounts for the drift in foreign policy.

The end of the Cold War changed India's geopolitical environment, as also of most other major nations of the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a major blow in terms of both diplomatic and strategic support. The space vacated by the Soviet Union was sought to be filled by China, both in the region as well as on the global stage. China had meanwhile established itself as a power with a pre-eminent economic status in the last quarter of the 20th century. The United States which emerged as the sole superpower from the Cold War

therefore thought it necessary to woo China so that it could play the role of a yes-man in the Security Council, and also help perpetuate the N-5 nuclear hegemony in the world.

This configuration of a weak Russia and a more confident China, willing to collude with the United States was hardly conducive to Indian interests. The result was the gradual evolution of highly constrictive international regimes. India had already shown lack of direction through its totally confused attitude during the Gulf war of 1991. But the global conference on environment and development which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations which ended in Marrakesh in 1994, totally exposed the weakness of India and its likes. (On these environmental and trade issues, China too was on the losing side.)

However, the culmination of American efforts to create an international system which would perpetuate its dominance along with its allies, and

deny opportunities of growth to other emerging powers, was an indefinite extension of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995 and the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996. Both these developments took place because of the connivance of the United Kingdom and France and the collusion of the Russian Federation and China with the United States. A large number of middle powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America endorsed these western initiatives either because they were cajoled to do so or because they thought their economic and strategic interests would be best served by not opposing the United States.

**W**hile the global environment that took shape in the first five years after the Cold War was suffocating, the developments in the neighbourhood too were not encouraging. Pakistan, under the cover of its nuclear weapon capability which it had acquired with China's help by January 1987, launched a proxy war in Kashmir in 1988-89. The United States, which knew that Pakistan had acquired a nuclear weapon capability, invoked the Pressler Amendment to deny economic and military aid to Pakistan only in 1990, after Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan in 1989. After a brief period of indifference, the United States again found itself supporting Pakistan when Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) launched the Taliban militia in Afghanistan in 1994.

At stake was access to Central Asia whose gas and oil pipelines needed alternative routes to the South, East and West. But the combined help of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United States enabled the Taliban militia to make rapid strides and capture the entire territory of Afghanistan upto Mazar-e-Sharif by August 1998.

The consolidation of a fundamentalist Islamic regime in Afghanistan was bad enough for India, but its ominous implications became visible when the number of militants of Afghani origin in Kashmir suddenly increased in 1998.

Central Asia had been a zone of friendship within the generally friendly perimeters of the Soviet Union. The break-up of the Soviet Union exposed this region to strategic pressures from the West. India enjoyed tremendous residual goodwill in this region from the days of the Soviet Union. Despite initial overtures from the leaders of Central Asia, India failed to translate this goodwill into concrete economic and strategic relationships. This space was gradually filled by the West and to some extent by China. But the cultural and religious vacuum created by the exit of Russia became an open invitation to the fundamentalist influences from the South. Wahhabism has been recognized as the most potent threat to the sufi and secular traditions of this region. The success of the Taliban militia in Afghanistan only lends credibility to this threat. In the process, it creates an additional obstacle to the pursuit of Indian objectives in this region.

**L**astly, in this survey of India's strategic environment since the end of the Cold War, one may refer to the state of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). This movement served as an anchor for major countries of the South to project their interests in the global fora where they were disadvantaged vis-à-vis the North. The gradual inroads made into the power structures of these countries of the South by wealthy countries of the North shook the foundations of South-South unity. Since 1989, most of the leaders of the South were in a case at their wits end as to how to redefine their role

in the post-Cold War world. Their capitulation came when in 1995 they acceded to an indefinite extension of the NPT, and in 1996 on signing the dotted line with regard to the CTBT. Therefore, when India faced the NAM summit in Durban in September 1998, the sailing was rough, whether it was on the question of Kashmir or the nuclear tests of May 1998.

**W**hen India conducted its nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May 1998, it was at once an act of defiance and fulfillment. It was a defiance of the international community which had imposed a hostile regime on India intended to curb its natural potential. It was the fulfillment of a national dream about which a consensus had developed in the previous three years. Irrespective of the immediate political motives of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party at the centre which took the decision, the nation reacted with a sense of pride and renewed confidence. The pride flowed from the demonstration of technological capability. The confidence emanated from the ability to take on its adversaries.

Unfortunately, however, the political leadership of the country did not rise to the occasion. After the subdued euphoria of the first few days, the leaders of political parties other than the ruling party started wobbling. Most of them reacted to this momentous event in partisan terms. And this despite the fact that it was only the left parties which were opposed to nuclear tests on grounds of principle. The ruling party on its part failed to devise a mechanism of consulting other parties on how to develop a post-nuclear national response. Nor did it utilize the abundant non-official expertise in projecting India's position abroad.

The result was that the country found itself divided and on the defensive on the most vital issue of national

security. Given the extent of defiance, it was natural for the status-quoist powers to condemn India. But if India had responded more unitedly and decisively, the condemnation would have lost much of its edge. The political leadership thus failed the nation.

The failure of political leadership to give direction was more critically evident in shaping a response to the demand for signing the CTBT. On this issue, though, the ruling party deserved blame. Its own lack of experience and expertise was compounded by an absence of a viable decision-making structure. And yet, the ruling party could have helped matters if it had kept consultations with key figures in other political parties and not allowed too many voices to speak on the subject on behalf of the government.

**I**n world politics today, neither alignment nor non-alignment are dominant features of national behaviour. International relations between every two major nations are conducted on the basis of mutuality of interests. In most cases, they run on two parallel tracks of conflict and cooperation. Either of the two tracks could acquire salience in a given situation when juxtaposed with relations with a third nation. The process is often described as engagement, as against indifference, isolation, or prolonged hostility.

India has to pursue a policy of 'engagement' with all major nations of the world. But there must be a framework, a sense of direction within which this policy should be pursued. The direction would be provided by a set of objectives. The foremost objective of Indian foreign policy in the 21st century should be to contribute to the evolution of a multipolar world. A secondary objective should be to strive towards the creation of a democratic world order. While India's relations

with major powers like the Russian Federation, China, the United States, and the other members of the power cluster called the G-8, would have to be conducted in accordance with these two objectives, India's relations with its neighbours would have to be governed in pursuit of the third objective, namely, safeguarding Indian security. And the maximization of India's economic interests in a globalized world should constitute the fourth objective. These objectives are not mutually exclusive. They overlap and intermesh. In fact, the first two are subservient to the last two.

**I**n pursuit of the first objective, i.e., the creation of a multipolar world, it is necessary for India to pay special attention to its relations with the Russian Federation. Geopolitically speaking, Russia is India's most obvious strategic partner. In the past, India has benefited greatly from Russia's diplomatic support, and its contribution to India's defence build-up to the extent of 70 per cent or more of its total capability. After the Cold War, even though there was a short period of mutual indifference between the two countries, their cooperation in the field of defence has been significantly increased. And yet, cultural and political exchanges are nowhere near the level they used to be during the Cold War days.

There is also a need for continuous and vigorous interaction in economic and technological fields. Russia, despite the retreat of communism, is a value-oriented power. Unlike the United States it does not conduct international relations only to seek economic or strategic advantages. Despite its temporary economic disarray, it has the potential to checkmate American aggressiveness, or resist American military pressures in any part of the world. India, therefore,

must do everything possible to boost Russia's stature in the world. Russia must remain as one of the pillars of a multipolar world.

Next to Russia, China has the potential to checkmate America's hegemonistic tendencies and thereby contribute to the evolution of a multipolar world. India's relations with China have been on the upswing ever since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in December 1988. Even if the progress in normalization of relations, particularly on the boundary question, has been slow, there must be a realization on both sides that improvement is of mutual interest. The setback caused by India's nuclear tests was to be expected, regardless of when the tests took place. Before the tests, China refused to consider India as worthy of talking to on the nuclear question. After the tests, hopefully, sooner or later, China will agree to talk to India on confidence building measures in the nuclear field.

**T**here is considerable commonality of interests between India and China on global issues pertaining to trade and environment. So far there has been regular dialogue between the two countries only on bilateral issues. It would be useful for India to involve China in a dialogue on trade and environmental issues on an ongoing basis. China will continue to oppose India's recognition as a nuclear weapon power in terms of the NPT and India being given a permanent seat in the Security Council. China will also continue to help build Pakistan's military capability, both nuclear and conventional. But, none of these should restrain India from a continuing dialogue with China on bilateral as well as global issues.

The third major power with which India must maintain good relations is the United States. The United



States is not only the most powerful country but also India's largest trade partner and investor. The United States evokes admiration and anger in equal measure in most countries of the world. India is no exception. In the long run, all would like to do business with it.

**S**ince World War II, the United States has tried to prevent the rise of new powers. Now it is India's turn to be at the receiving end. The Indo-US dialogue which started after India's nuclear tests and has gone through five rounds or so is a process by which the United States is getting acclimatised to India's new status. India has some inherent advantages which cannot be ignored. Its large market with a 300 million purchasing class, its vast investment potential as an emerging economic power, and its democracy run on the basis of the rule of law, are assets which a commercially minded nation like the United States would value.

It would therefore be advisable for India to maintain considerable resilience in its dialogue with the United States. Whether it is the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, or the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, or the deployment of nuclear weapons, there is no need to yield to American pressures and compromise on India's basic interests. India's principled stand on weapons of mass destruction, that it has the right to possess them to meet its security threats until they are completely eliminated from the world, has met with wide appreciation in non-official American circles. It will ultimately stand the test of time. Meanwhile, there is no substitute for engaging America in the pursuit of those goals where Indo-US interests do not collide.

The next set of objectives pertains to the creation of a democratic

world order. This has been one of India's goals since independence. So far the Non Aligned Movement was supposed to be a major instrument of achieving this goal. For reasons stated earlier, NAM is no longer capable of performing this role. Alignment and non-alignment are no longer meaningful frameworks. Rhetoric, which has been a hallmark of the NAM style, must be replaced by action.

A democratization of the world order necessitates restructuring the composition and procedures of the Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions. This cannot be brought about by votes in the General Assembly. What is needed is a dispersal of economic and military power which is presently concentrated in the G-8. This can be done by a two-fold strategy. One, regional economic organizations in Asia, Africa and Latin America should be strengthened. Two, they should prepare well for effective bargaining on trade and economic issues in organizations like the WTO (World Trade Organization). No quick results, however, should be expected in this endeavour.

**S**afeguarding Indian security constitutes the third objective. 'Security' is a comprehensive concept. Here, however, we are concerned with security threats from known external sources, namely, China and Pakistan. The question of China has been dealt with earlier. Brief comments on Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia are called for.

War between India and Pakistan is completely ruled out, particularly after the nuclear tests of May 1998. Options for the resolution of Indo-Pak disputes, whether on Kashmir or other issues, are therefore severely limited. This is well realized in Pakistan as well. A recourse to dialogue is unavoidable. The so-called composite

dialogue held between the two countries in October-November 1998 was not entirely without gains. This was the first such exercise after the nuclear tests.

Pakistan needs time to put its own house in order and develop a national consensus on rapprochement with India. That is why even the limited gains in the dialogue on trade and economic cooperation were not publicly admitted by the Pakistani delegation. The significance of the nuclear tests has yet to sink into the Pakistani psyche. Pakistani decision-makers still want to prove the point that India-Pakistan disputes cannot be resolved without third party mediation. Therefore, while being watchful, India must exercise patience with Pakistan and continue the dialogue.

**I**ndia has been without any influence or role in Afghanistan ever since 1979. The recent victory of the Taliban militia over more than 90 per cent of Afghanistan's territory has overwhelmingly negative implications for India. One of the abject failures or lapses of Indian policy was illustrated by the fact that even when Mazar-e-Sharif was temporarily captured by the Taliban in May 1997, India, along with Iran, Russia, and the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan did not do enough to checkmate their subsequent advance. India is facing the consequence of inaction in the form of Afghani militants in Kashmir.

Whether the Taliban phenomenon in Afghanistan is reversible is doubtful. What is, however, possible is to build fortifications against its influence in Central Asia. The leadership of all the five states in Central Asia is extremely wary of the destabilizing effect that any Taliban advance would have on the whole

region. So far, Russia is the only outside country willing to make common cause with it. But Russia's role would be confined to providing military support in terms of the Tashkent Treaty of May 1992.

India, on the other hand, has a strong ideological affinity with Central Asia. This affinity is focused on safeguarding and strengthening the age-old sufi and secular tradition of the region. India has pursued this objective through sporadic intellectual interaction, but what was needed was a pervasive Indian economic presence. There was also tremendous scope for India's help in the field of education, particularly in the primary and secondary sectors. Unfortunately, however, India's capacity to exercise influence in this strategic hinterland has been constrained by a lack of strategy and will. Even now, India would do well to target economically weak areas which are specially amenable to fundamentalist influence, like the Ferghana valley, and play a role in their development.

Lastly, there is the objective of maximizing India's economic interests which is largely a function of domestic policy, both political and economic. And yet, foreign policy is a major instrument of economic growth. Foreign policy plays this role in two ways. First, by working to create favourable international economic regimes through multilateral institutions, and second, by getting the best one-to-one deals through bilateral talks. Specific strategies in both respects have been discussed earlier and need no elaboration.

One may conclude by stating the obvious. Foreign policy can enhance domestic strength but cannot be treated as a scapegoat for domestic weakness. A good foreign policy can have a multiplier effect. A bad domestic policy can only lead to ridicule and rejection.

## Rethinking the fundamentals

K. SHANKAR BAJPAI

AN examination of issues, such as this publication has undertaken, are of value primarily to the extent that they indicate ways of future improvement. The past is a useful teacher up to a point and therefore needs looking at, but it is even more necessary to get back to the basics of what foreign policy implies and requires. At the risk of seeming to underestimate the knowledge and understanding of our readership, let us recapitulate a few fundamentals.

The ultimate purpose a country's foreign policy must serve is to enable its peoples to enhance their way of life on their land. This sets up two major objectives: national security and economic betterment; each of which, in turn, has to be sought in accordance with the constraints and compulsions of two other factors: domestic politics and external interactions. The demands of each of these four principal determinants of a sound foreign policy may conflict with each other. During the Cold War, for instance, India's defence requirements called for close cooperation with the USSR, whereas it is at least arguable that our economic progress might have been better through greater cooperation with the West; similarly, the dangers to our territorial integrity

from outside needed far greater military expenditure than our domestic politics seemed to permit. The balancing of such varied and often competing pressures and requirements constitutes the primary task of policy-makers who, moreover can only function effectively if they have and, most importantly, share, an appropriate frame of reference. To understand how India's foreign policy evolved, it is first necessary to understand what frame of reference the leaders of our newly independent country operated within.

**I**n the minds that were brought to bear on the evolution of the newly independent India's international position and relationships, several formative elements jostled for influence. The first was our inwardness. Borobudur and Angkor Wat notwithstanding, we have been isolationist throughout history. *Jambu Dwipa* may originally have had cosmological significance but it also reflects our self-definition as an island cut off from all other lands. Even when independent India has been roaming the world as a great activist, our greatest desire has been to be left alone.

Our experience of subjugation gave rise to three equally powerful tendencies: anti-colonialism, a profound aversion to power politics, and the insistence that only the right to think things out for oneself could give us complete independence. Mistrust of western powers was nurtured by the first two of these (along with fears of economic imperialism and neo colonialism) while in the third lay the seeds of non-alignment.

Another major influence arose from the nature of our nationalist movement, specifically the teachings of Gandhi and the appeal of non violence. This led us from the view that power-politics is evil, to an abhorrence

of power itself. Again and again, our leaders of that time spoke out against both as the cause of international conflict. And since power was largely seen as military force, we deprecated the latter as an instrument for ourselves. (Though not articulated openly, the apprehension of a man on horseback surely reinforced this attitude, along with the supposition that expenditure on defence would come in the way of economic growth.)

Nor should we fail to note the role of socialism. In the decades preceding our independence its appeal was world-wide, more so to a colonised people whose principal friends and advocates were to be found among socialists. Apart from its theoretical attractiveness; Marxism was seen as the enemy of imperialism, and had the added value of providing cut and dried analyses of world developments to people inexperienced in such matters – a complete frame of reference in itself.

**N**ot least, every Indian had looked forward to independence as releasing our capabilities. The belief that our long-suppressed energies, talents and viewpoints could at last operate on the world stage, encouraged a conviction that India had something new to offer in determining the interaction between states and the evolution of a new world. This was further encouraged by the coincidental ending of the Second World War and the creation of the United Nations, when not only in India but the world over a spirit of idealism, of hope for an international order based on peace and justice flickered for a while. On the other hand, as we looked at the world around us for the first time through our own eyes, what loomed largest on its horizons was the threat of yet another major conflagration, containing among all its terrible consequences the destruc-

tion of all our hopes for rapid economic development

**O**ther circumstances in which we became independent provided additional inputs into our earliest attitudes. The greatest influence came from the fact of Partition. For generations we had been told by our colonial masters that India was too marked by differences of race, religion, language and so on to be able to remain one state once we lost the cementing force which colonial rule had provided. Our nationalist movement, whatever the strands that constituted it, with the obvious exception of the Muslim separatists, challenged this as an imperialist divide-and-rule device.

We claimed fervently that we were all brothers who would become even more united left to ourselves, but it is hardly in doubt that deep down there was a profound unease, the awful fear that however sincerely we believed in our unity, however genuinely we rejected the British arguments to the contrary, there might after all be enough to them to require particular attentiveness to the maintenance of our unity. This underlying apprehension was to manifest itself most significantly in the domestic arrangements we went in for with their emphasis on an over-mighty Centre, but it also influenced greatly our approach to foreign affairs.

Partition not only strengthened our unspoken and, in the atmosphere of those times, unspeakable fears regarding our unity, it brought with it the still continuing problem of Kashmir, the immediate effect of which was to make our leaders turn to the one instrument of state policy which they most denounced. The need for our military forces became quickly evident when the fledgling government had to cope with the massacres and migrations accompanying Partition.

Its deployment in Junagadh, and more extensively in Hyderabad, were essentially police actions, but Kashmir soon became a virtual war, reinforcing both the need for our army and its reputation. Still, to our new leaders it seemed that military expenditure was contrary to our international pacificism, harmful to our economic development and, above all, dangerous for democracy.

**T**his ambivalence about the role of armed force in the exercise of state power was to become even more complex as time passed: the 1962 fiasco with China finally forced recognition of the need for a strong military force, but old hesitations about the role of the military in our polity or our policy-making prevented the development of any mechanisms or systems for making strategic military thinking a part of governmental planning (while, oddly enough, our governments became increasingly prone to rely on armed force for the management of even domestic problems). The point of significance was that our leaders hoped to produce a method of handling India's external relations in which military capability was at a discount.

All this, then, provided the inputs that determined our attitude to the world, our sense of India's place in it and of the contribution we should make to it: an overwhelming concentration on India as a world unto itself; inexperience in dealing with the world as it combined with a profound mistrust of it; a particular suspicion of the only part of it that had entered our consciousness, namely the West; a predilection for socialism and therefore a hope, if not an established sense, of affinity with those elements in the world – writers and thinkers, political parties or states and government – in whom we saw a fellow-feeling; the belief that the world needed a new

message and that India could provide it; a special sense of mission in working with other victims of colonialism to end it; fear of militarism in general and of the armed confrontation developing in the world into which we had emerged, countering which was a high priority; above all the longing to be left alone to advance our economy and consolidate our Indian identity.

After half a century, how differently do we approach the very different world we have to deal with? Can it be objectively said that our frame of reference has evolved, either to discard the inaccurate and the irrelevant or to take account of what is new or appropriate? Consider just one point: since the end of the Cold War, the most repeated platitude has been that now the prime determinant of foreign policy is economics. Is there any noticeable evidence that we actually put this theory into practice? Some might say our entire liberalisation idea was such an attempt (or, as the more ideologically minded put it, we are selling out to the West), but in fact it is the inhibitions about liberalisation that show how once again the domestic situation is limiting the adaptations and new directions needed in foreign policy.

**C**onsider energy. Nothing is more vital to our future, to our survival no less than to our progress. In what ways is our foreign policy being allowed to optimise our energy supplies for the coming decades? Our handling of this, more precisely our dithering about it, illustrates perhaps the most significant change in our approach to foreign policy: instead of becoming more practical, purposeful or adept, we have become increasingly subject to inexperience and uncertainty.

India's political evolution has been one of the marvels of history. Going rapidly through the democra-

tisation which took generations elsewhere, we have empowered the hitherto excluded elements of society to the greater long-term stability of our polity and society. The inevitable price is the ascendancy of parochial and ever more inward-looking considerations in policy-making.

**W**e have greatly expanded our defence systems and capabilities, but this does not betoken any increase in our comprehension of how the world works or how we should deal with it. It is indeed an example of our failure to improve our practice of statecraft. We have let problems reach a point where no solution is possible without at least an initial use of force. This is most evident in our domestic life but is also an underlying weakness in our approach to international affairs. The real role of power in the world is something we have yet to come to terms with. Military strength is certainly an essential element, but as we always emphasise that too depends ultimately on economic power; what we seem not to recognise is that anticipation, pre-emption, persuasion, ideas are all also crucial to the application of influence which is part of the use of power.

Which brings us to yet another aspect of India's behaviour vital to any comprehension of its motivation: the things we did or did not do, or the ways in which we did them, were determined not only by the elements that went into our frame of reference but by our habits of living and dealing with each other. The former shape a country's foreign policy, the latter its diplomacy. There is much confusion about these terms, almost as though they are interchangeable. India's media commentators, who were to become the most outspoken critics of how India handled its external relations, frequently poured scorn on our mistaken foreign policy when what

they actually talked about were failures of diplomacy.

Broadly speaking, diplomacy is to foreign policy what tactics are to strategy, the attempts to give effect on the ground to the goals and routes thereto worked out by headquarters. If our foreign policy was worked out within the ideas, experiences and attitudes prevailing in our policy-making centres, our diplomacy was immensely conditioned by the ways we Indians behave 'on the ground.' And the key point is that we are not exactly at ease in dealing with each other, leading to a distinct awkwardness and frequent ham-handedness in dealing with outsiders. Worse still, our press and Parliament have no use for anything less than the most strident and extreme language, forcing us to shed the balanced and measured terms so essential to diplomacy.

It has long been the fashion to blame most of our international drawbacks or set-backs on our professional diplomats. There is room for improvement everywhere but as the principal instrument for our interaction with the world, our foreign service has not lacked either quality or expertise; the problem has been disuse. Nor have we developed the extra-governmental inputs so vital to healthy policy making. With some very impressive exceptions, public discussion of issues involving external relations, most specially strategic but also diplomatic, whether among legislators, academia or the media, reflect an amateurism which is more rather than less evident in government as a whole.

A perfectly valid case can be made that, whatever may be said about the rewards or advantages it has missed in various parts of the world, on the vital objective of national security, India has maintained its interests pretty satisfactorily. Except for the ini-

tial losses to China, and a few square miles in the Rann of Kutch, our territory remains what we say it should be. We have withstood the worst that Pakistan has tried. Regardless of the pros and cons of our nuclear developments, we are in a better position than ever before to protect ourselves, so why the carping?

The submission here is, that is all very well (and full of the debatable), but it does not lessen the main point: we are not only far from having that position in the world which our size, capabilities and talents ought long since to have earned us, we are actually experiencing a diminution of our role and of our potential to serve our interests better. Most of this is due to non-foreign policy factors, but as the survey above was intended to bring out, we are also still largely stuck in the ideas and attitudes of our birth. Indeed in many ways we are even less ready to cope with the world as it is. Both the concepts and the mechanics of our foreign policy need up-dating. That will only come about if we first and foremost base our approaches on two realities: we must develop our self-confidence, and we must come to terms with the role of power in the world.

It passes all understanding why we are constantly afraid of outside forces undermining our independence; if America is not out to subvert us, the multinationals will take us over. Granted that one of the worst legacies of colonisation is being robbed of self-confidence, surely by now we should have recovered. And sad though it is, the world is unfair and unequal: power must exercise itself, and no amount of howling against it will lessen its role. We must learn to live with it and to handle it. The alternative is to be ever less relevant to the world, and to stagnate.

# Books

**THE FUTURE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: A US-India Dialogue** edited by Victoria L. Farmer.  
Proceedings of a conference held in Philadelphia, 5-8 May 1997. CASI, 1998.

IN the aftermath of India's unexpected nuclear tests of 11 and 13 May this year, Jaswant Singh's paper, written for the Center for the Advanced Study of India-organised conference in May 1997 has more than mere scholarly value. Singh added a postscript in June 1998 after India's tests, and in view of his critical role as the Indian government's chief negotiator on the nuclear issue, including in the ongoing Indo-US talks involving US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, his expressed opinions are of particular significance. The CASI dialogue, the second in a series, the first of which was sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs, was sponsored by the US Department of Energy and the W. Alton Jones Secure Society Program. Participants on both sides included policy-makers and academics working on security issues. Significantly, on the Indian side, scholars with anti-nuclear positions were conspicuous by their absence (with the singular exception of M. V. Ramanna, a post-doctoral fellow at MIT, who was only an observer).

Jaswant Singh's paper was presented in absentia by S.K. Singh, former Foreign Secretary. Singh's paper is notable for its rather unusual reading of Indian

history which many, even of the Sangh combine, would find difficult to accept. He claims, for instance, that 'its [India's] historical tradition was entirely bardic—oral,' really. Later, however, he does concede a 'recorded history' at least 'from 326 BC, when Alexander prevailed over Porus.' But despite these, and other inconsistencies, a 'pro-Hindutva' bias remains.

Thus the Revolt of 1857 is reduced 'to the final overthrow of the Mughal Empire' and 'to the skirmishes of 1857.' This disregarding of the 1857 Revolt, which is not even termed a Sepoy Mutiny, as the colonial British historians dubbed it, is necessitated by Singh's contention that during this period, i.e. from 326 BC to 1857 'India "lost" to waves of aggressors, principally because the notion of the "territory" of an "Indian state" was just not there; nothing, therefore, had to be defended at all costs.' Given Singh's own origins, this latter statement is particularly surprising since the Rajputs, apart from their reputation as relentless fighters, also had the tradition of *jauhar*, when their women committed mass suicide by throwing themselves into pyres rather than risk capture. It is difficult to think of more resolute defence.

Singh's theorization, though in line with RSS theology, is problematic. Though, 'A sense of [Indian] nationhood, predating the evolution of western nation states by many millennia, has certainly existed... Indian statehood has been episodic and only incident-

tal.' Historically, there was 'a failure to evolve an Indian state... [which] became the cause, in turn, of failing to do so even after Independence.' Furthermore, according to Singh, 'that sense of nationhood... in India's case, is in essence non-territorial.' So how did this nationhood exist, without both territory and a state? Purportedly through the existence of an 'Indian civilization... [which was] entirely non-proselytizing.' While such arguments are common enough in RSS inspired circles, they remain unconvincing. If 'patriotism, as an emotion toward the nation, has always been in abundance,' what was its subject, if neither a defined territory or demarcated geographical space, much less an existing state provided the basis for this national loyalty? Moreover, as is well known, pre-feudal India of centuries past was marked by parochial loyalties as the notion of an 'Indian' nation is a modern and relatively recent concept.

Singh's own claims about Indian nationhood are part of his basic argument, that because of an absence of a territory and a state, India has 'no inheritance of strategic thought.' This is also due to the fact that, 'Because of our convictions about honour and chivalry... because of the absence of resolve to finish off the enemy when the opportunity arose, our adversaries routinely got the better of India.' The example of Prithviraj Chauhan's battles against Shahabuddin Ghauri is cited, though history is replete with contrary examples. Ashoka, appalled by the bloody devastation in the war against Kalinga in which thousands of the enemy were 'finished off', turned to Buddhism. But, disregarding all inconvenient history, Singh further claims that 'in the Indian mind, shaped by a forgiving cultural milieu, war has always been regarded as an uncivil and undisciplined activity.' In more modern times, 'Our confusion with Gandhian pacifism, and the lure of the moral tones of nonalignment relegated strategic thinking to an irrelevancy.'

Nowhere does Singh explain how the policy of non-alignment was devoid of any strategic thinking. Didn't the builders of NAM consider it in their national interests to stay clear of the bloc rivalries characteristic of the Cold War? And weren't the principles of Panchsheel enunciated at Bandung explicitly related to perceptions of national security interests? When he concludes that, 'For India, state-centric perceptions, state influence, and sovereign national interests can be the only guideposts of policy,' he is stating nothing new, much less revealing a profound insight. Singh can instead be faulted on his excessive focus on the state, ignoring popular aspirations and interests. In today's

world, it is clear that no state can be sure that it can oppress its own people with impunity with no international intervention. And popular upsurges have shown their capacity to destabilise strongly entrenched states and regimes, as in the former Soviet Union and Indonesia.

But Singh's major problem is nuclear policy. He is very critical of the lack of continued testing and the failure to weaponise after the 1974 nuclear tests: 'Had we straight after conducted a series of other such tests and established clearly our ability, then it would have been easier to cope with all the confusion of subsequent years, and all the other difficulties.' However, in his postscript of 1 June 1998, India's decision to develop its nuclear capability is explained by 'the gradual deterioration of India's security environment, principally on account of nuclear and missile proliferation in its neighbourhood.' Yet, India's becoming a nuclear weapon state is lauded as 'an endowment to the nation, its due, the right of one-sixth of humankind.'

In all this, an analysis of what constitutes India's national security in a changing world order, though promised by the title of the paper, is never even attempted. Though there are stray remarks about economic policy and a longer section about the need for maximising self-sufficiency in energy, there is no attempt to examine non-military aspects of national security. This is as troubling as Singh's excursions into Indian history, as it indicates an approach to national security that is chauvinist, militarist and simplistic.

Any hope that the proceedings of the CASI conference at which this paper was presented would be significantly more informative and profound is quickly belied. C. Raja Mohan, for instance, dismisses much of India's nuclear policy which he terms 'disarmament fundamentalism' as derived from Nehru's 'whims and fancies.' He later suggests that the US recognise India 'as a *de facto* nuclear weapon state... leaving enough room for India to develop a credible deterrent posture as a political insurance against China,' along with the resumption of 'high technology cooperation with New Delhi' which could form the basis both of a nuclear accord with India and 'help build a stable balance of power in Asia.' But as Amitabh Mattoo points out later, a national commitment to devote 'huge resources as well as the long-term political resolve needed to match China's nuclear arsenal' is questionable. He agrees with P.K. Iyengar of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission that, 'India's current policy of strategic ambiguity, by its very opaqueness and uncertainty, does offer an existential deterrent against China.'

For Raja Mohan, as for other Indian advocates of nuclear weapons, since 'The revolution in military affairs, the application of information technology to warfare...is going to substantially strengthen the American lead over all the other powers...for the Chinese, Russians and even Indians, in the long term the value of nuclear weapons is going to be much greater. For them...even to stay in the league of the big boys, nuclear weapons become much more important than they were before.' This encapsulates basic tenets of the nuclearist argument: nuclear weapons are a necessary ingredient of power and thus essential to national security, because of the US's technological lead nuclear weapons would be required for at least as long as one can imagine, since a 'collective security system' necessary for global disarmament 'is very difficult to structure,' and therefore unlikely. Raja Mohan's terminology, e.g., the need for India to stay with the 'big boys', reveals the masculinist and macho ideology behind nuclearism.

To be fair, none of the American participants in the conference offer anti-nuclear or anti-realist arguments. Even if these are not accepted, these should at least be addressed. But that is the greatest failing in this entire discussion. If global disarmament is to be understood as more than an utopian and idealistic goal which the Raja Mohans can deride as 'disarmament fundamentalism', then the fundamental and exceedingly dangerous instability that the spread of nuclear weapons creates needs to be examined. The increasingly recognised and critiqued inadequacies of the dominant realist theory of international relations, as well as of what India as recently as 1995 in its submission to the International Court of Justice called the 'morally abhorrent' theory of nuclear deterrence, need to be widely and comprehensively discussed. But not only are these issues wholly absent in the discourse of current policy-makers, but the obscurantist and chauvinist mindset revealed in Jaswant Singh's paper can only be most disturbing in a nuclear India.

**Kamal Mitra Chenoy**

**INDIA TOWARDS MILLENNIUM** edited by  
P.R. Chari. Manohar, Delhi, 1998.

THE evaluation, in a single volume of essays, of India's performance as a functioning democracy over the past half a century of Independence is a daunting task. In fact, Padmanabha Ranganatha Chari, retired IAS officer turned academic, who has edited these

dozen wide ranging articles himself admits in his concluding remarks: 'It is clearly impossible to reach definitive conclusions on so complex and encyclopaedic a question as India's record over the last fifty years.' Yet, the attempt is a creditable one, for it is more than necessary to ruminate the past to prognosticate what the future holds for the country as it moves towards a new millennium.

Much like India's balance sheet over the past five decades, the book too is a mixed bag. There are at least two outstanding contributions from T.C.A. Ramanuchari on the Constitution and G.K. Arora on the bureaucracy. Prem Shankar Jha, B.G. Verghese and P.V. Indiresan chip in with useful insights on the looming economic crisis, the education mess and the technology backlog. But the sections on political parties, foreign policy and security, culture and gender disappoint, lacking the perceptive sweep of the other essays.

Ramanuchari argues with great perspicacity in his paper on the Constitution the need to liberate the guiding principles of independent India from the gross and often willful misinterpretation that has led to its present distortion. He quotes Heidegger to stress the importance of stepping back right to the beginning to reveal the 'noble vision' of the Constitution which sought to secure and protect a social order in which justice would prevail in all institutions of national life. Rejecting the recent tendency to blame the inadequacy of existing constitutional provisions as well as proposals to make fanciful changes, Ramanuchari makes a compelling case of giving the Constitution a fair trial in its true spirit.

In sharp contrast Arora, in his ruthless dissection of the Indian bureaucracy, questions the very foundational beliefs of the civil service. He argues that the demystification of the bureaucrat's colonial image as the supreme public protector is the only way out and adds that because of new emerging political structures like panchayati raj, the process may already have started. 'Once the halo of the keeper of the keys of the kingdom is withdrawn from the members of the canonical order and the burden of the territorial imperative placed firmly on the heads of the elected representatives, it is possible to consider new beginnings,' asserts Arora. He maintains that once the question of who has the power is out of the way, it would become easier to reorganise the bureaucracy according to the needs of modern India.

Jha laments the wasted promise of India becoming an industrial power, laying the blame on the inability of successive governments to adapt to a fast changing world economy and raising fears that



the country may well become a victim rather than a beneficiary of globalisation. Verghese points to the fundamental mistake in education policy of indiscriminately subsidising higher education as 'development' and treating primary education as 'welfare' which could wait. And, in his chapter looking back at 50 years of Indian technology, Indiresan gives example after example of how because of its own folly, the country repeatedly surrendered its technological advantages which could have been exploited in the global jungle.

Significantly, many of the essays trace the causes of the present crisis of the Indian state to mistakes made in the formative years of the Republic rather than to the more obvious misdemeanours by recent regimes. This belies the fashionable tendency these days among the chattering classes to lay the entire blame at the door of the present political class and bureaucracy. The book, therefore, is a timely reminder that the way out of the tunnel for India lies in making seminal changes instead of chasing after surface disorders arising out of an original malaise.

It is a pity, however, that some of the contributions are inconsistent with the high standards set by the rest in the volume. Khare, for instance, in his treatise on politics sums up the history of political parties but fails to adequately address the crucial paradox raised by Arora in his paper on how democracy, while bringing politics closer to the people, has made democratic government more and more difficult. Subrahmanyam's standard nuclear panacea to the security threat and the truisms on a proactive foreign policy by Gonsalves are far too simplistic a response to the complex power equations in the neighbourhood and elsewhere in an unipolar world. The normally eloquent Butalia is surprisingly subdued on the status of women while Vyas, after turning his back on the consumerist middle class, pointedly refuses to analyse the mushrooming pop filmi culture engulfing city and village alike. A major gap in the book is the absence of a separate piece on the judiciary, particularly since the editor himself concludes that the one-word mantra needed to make India united, strong and viable is none other than justice.

**Ajoy Bose**

**DEVELOPMENT, ETHNICITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA** by Ross Mallick. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

Ross Mallick is angry with the scholarship on South Asia, particularly as it reaches the international com-

munity. He finds it inaccurate, selective and self-serving in its use and interpretation of information.

Mallick's ire is particularly directed at the West Bengal Left Front government, and those whom he sees as holding a brief for it, pointing repeatedly and accusingly at Atul Kohli and Thomas Nossiter. His two earlier publications, *Development Policy of a Communist Government: West Bengal Since 1977* (1993) and *Indian Communism: Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalisation* (1994), explain his preoccupation. His judgment that there is little to laud in the West Bengal communist government which did not 'confront the rural elite' and actually promoted their class interest, which not only did not effect a 'redistribution of assets... through land redistribution or at least by progressive agricultural taxation,' but pursued elite landed class interest (p. 101) pervades his treatment of this subject.

In his castigation of extant scholarship, Mallick repeatedly adverts to funding imperatives controlling research agendas, a factor that is of serious concern in Indian scholarship, widely acknowledged and discussed in informal arenas but which has perhaps not yet been taken head on. Then there is the bias of the elite scholar to elite positions. There is also the whitewashing of the subaltern, where the voices of the subaltern subject is restructured into the language and context of the elite. He refers to subtle and not so subtle 'threats of torture and requests for bribe' (p. 285) which are used as a means of influencing scholars. His indictment of scholarship which 'sanitises in a way that permits return access and ensures academic kudos' (p. 50) is depressing. It is difficult to deny that these are legitimate concerns which the academic community needs to confront.

Perhaps Mallick's identity as a 'development consultant' makes him reserve mere impatience for foreign aid agencies, and leads him to suggest, time after time, that western aid should be linked to human rights and the treatment of minorities. For him, it is the 'new urban middle class which continues caste practices in private life' and which is 'generally opposed to foreign pressure for human rights implementation' (p. 244). It is perhaps true that there will be few takers for his position that 'international aid can be an important asset in conflict resolution,' particularly when he claims soon after: 'The development programmes of South Asian states provide opportunities for international organisations such as the IMF and World Bank to assist regional organisations in multilateral endeavours' (p. 34).

When, in the context of tribal land alienation, he refers to the Narmada dam project to state: 'Even if

governments choose to ignore the protests, international lending agencies will be pressured to withhold funds by indigenous and international NGOs,' and adds: 'The World Bank's decision to withhold further funding for Narmada points to a new awareness of the adverse effects development can have on tribal peoples,' we know he is speaking only half-truths. His gentleness with aid agencies is evident time and again when; for instance, he finds Sri Lanka having 'utilised foreign aid for ethnic swamping and thereby helped foment a civil war' (p.131).

This attribution of innocence to aid agencies continues when he states that 'though foreign donors inadvertently contributed to the alienation of tribal homelands, the publicity surrounding the Chakma struggle appears to have made the aid community more sensitive to the effects its aid might be having' (p.187). This, even as he refers to tribals in Bangladesh 'being decimated by ethnic cleansing... done with the complicity of western governments and their aid agencies,' and, again, the 'leading cause of tribal displacement during the Pakistan era (in Bangladesh) [being] foreign aid which, as in Sri Lanka, altered the ethnic composition of the local population' (p.181). Severe indentments, even if apparently unintended.

It is the Marichjhapi massacre that Mallick uses to demonstrate the failure of scholarship. In an aggressive assertion, he claims: 'If the massacre is recorded at all it is because I am writing about it now' (p. 288). Let me set it out as Mallick presents it: When the Left Front came to power in West Bengal, one of the biggest problems was the influx of millions of East Bengal refugees. The poorest among them had been forced by the Congress government to settle at Dandakaranya in Madhya Pradesh. The communists had demanded that they be settled in the uninhabited Sundarbans Ganges delta. With the advent of Left Front rule, he refugees 'took them at their word,' sold their belongings in Dandakaranya and returned to West Bengal. A visiting team of parliamentarians, nominated by Morarji Desai to investigate Marichjhapi prior to the eviction that was to lead up to the massacre, found that about 30,000 untouchable refugees who had managed to reach and settle at Marichjhapi had, to quote Mallick, 'by their own efforts... established a viable fishing industry, salt pans, health centres and schools' (p.286).

The state government, however, demanded that they leave the settlement and flung the Forest Act at the settlers, Sundarbans being a reserve forest. 'When persuasion failed to make the refugees abandon their

settlement, on 26 January 1979 the West Bengal government started an economic blockade of the settlement with 30 police launches. The community was teargassed, huts razed and fisheries and tube-wells destroyed in an attempt to deprive them of food and water. The Calcutta High Court ordered a lifting of the blockade, but this was ignored.... When these police actions failed to persuade the untouchable refugees to leave, the state government ordered the forcible evacuation of the refugees which took place from 14 to 16 May 1970.... Several hundred men, women and children were said to have been killed in the operation and their bodies dumped in the river. Photographs were published in the *Anand Bazar Patrika*' (p. 287).

The Marichjhapi file at the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Commission contained a list with the names and ages of 236 men, women and children killed by the police at Marichjhapi prior to the massacre. The refugees told visiting MPs that a thousand of them had died of disease and starvation during the occupation and blockade. And an article in *The Oppressed Indian*, in July 1982, cites that 'of the 14,388 families who deserted, 10,260 families returned to their previous places... and the remaining 4128 families perished in transit, died of starvation, exhaustion, and many were killed in Kashipur, Kumirmari, and Marichjhapi firings' (pp. 287-288).

Yet, no criminal charges were brought against any of those involved in the action. No investigation was undertaken. The SC and ST Commission in its annual report recorded that there were no atrocities against the untouchables in West Bengal. And scholarly writing pretended that it had never happened.

It appears there was one more episode to complete this sordid event: once the forest had been cleared of the refugees, 'the CPM settled its own supporters in Marichjhapi, occupying and utilising the facilities left behind by the evicted refugees. The need for environmental preservation and compliance with the Forest Act were forgotten' (p. 288).

The fading away of memories of such gross violations is a perpetual danger, particularly where there is a diversifying of arenas and incidents which create victims of violence. Perhaps a meticulous documenting of such violence has become an imperative, not only out of respect for the victims but also to provide the background for locating a counter to such violence.

Ross Mallick's judgement that the untouchables are the 'last segregated group in the world outlasting South African apartheid' (pp. 57 and 233) may seem a bit too optimistic about the state of other subordi-

nated peoples of the world. Similarly, there may not be too many takers for his position that 'apartheid has disappeared in South Africa' even when one may agree that it is 'rampant in India' (p. 261). Perhaps it is that he finds the comparison useful to explain the Indian elite's resistance to 'subaltern emancipation', and to the absence of any self-doubt in the Indian elite's 'divine right to rule' (p. 261). In any event, his analysis that 'colonial strategy, despite its limitations, was more conducive to the political emancipation of untouchables than was the Congress policy of cooption,' (p. 236) may deserve scrutiny. So too his caution that the 'differential impact of colonialism on subaltern emancipation needs to be recognised for the opportunities it provided rather than being condemned according to the nationalist agenda of scholars' (p. 236).

The image of ethnic swamping in the Sri Lankan experience with the Mahaweli irrigation scheme to which he refers (p. 131), is reinforced by his reference to the construction of the Kaptai dam in Bangladesh which flooded 40% of the cultivable lands (p. 182), even as it displaced 96,000 tribals and 'altered the ethnic composition of the local population' (p. 181). It leaves one wondering what the dispossession and displacement of tribals, done in the name of the panacea called 'development', means in the Indian context.

Mallick relies on select case studies from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India in his analysis of ethnicity, human rights and, to an extent, development. In the process, it must be said, a diversity of persons, groups and institution and a complexity of issues which are now everyday fare – militancy and state action, repressive laws, liberalisation, the judiciary and bonded labour are only examples – in the human rights and development debate get hardly a passing mention.

**Usha Ramanathan**

**INTERNAL CONFLICTS IN SOUTH ASIA** edited by Kumar Rupesinghe and Khawar Mumtaz. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1996.

DURING the last five decades, many policy as well as political changes have taken place in South Asian countries. The degree and intensity of violence and unrest has escalated dramatically, particularly in the last decade. Long-running conflicts within these countries became more deeply entrenched while new conflicts arose. As a result, these societies have faced an upsurge

of ethnic violence, communal tensions, militant activities, misuse of political powers, insecurity and criminality. Thus, the South Asian region has been marked by different kinds of internal conflicts. At a time when SAARC has completed over a decade of its existence and ways and means are increasingly being discussed to widen the area of regional cooperation, this book provides appropriate and timely pointers towards resolving the problems of internal disorders.

The edited book under review analyses a wide range of issues relating to the development of internal conflicts in the South Asian region and attempts to identify the possibilities for transforming and resolving them into peaceful solutions. The book contains a comprehensive introduction and four articles on Pakistan's military bureaucracy, fundamentalism, militarization of civil society and the gender dimension in Sindh's ethnic conflict; three chapters on India's civilization, politics of violence and politicization of Hindu women; a paper on Sri Lanka's militarization and violent society; and one on Bangladesh's democratization process. Besides the above country-specific articles, there are two regional papers relating to ethnic conflict and strategies for resolving them.

The Pakistan specific articles are primarily related to growing terrorism, indiscipline and fragmentation of society. Akmal Hussain in 'The Dynamics of Power: Militancy, Bureaucracy and the People' examines the relative powers of the military, political personalities and Pakistani population. He analyses the distorted economic performance marked by slow economic growth, mounting foreign debt, continued aid dependence and the increasing fragmentation of civil society resulting from the widespread availability of surplus arms from the Afghan war, the growth of heroin trade and an erosion of the state's monopoly on violence. The author has foregrounded the growing power of the Pakistani military relative to the bureaucracy and its bearing on country's political life.

Abbas Rashid in his paper, 'Pakistan: The Politics of Fundamentalism', observes that the resurgence of Islam in Pakistan can be traced to the fundamentalist Islamic schools and their traditionalist intellectual framework. A new era of state-sponsored fundamentalism was introduced by General Zia when he came to power in 1977 and the subsequent promulgation of constitutional changes. To counter the strong influence of Islamic fundamentalism on the Government of Pakistan, the author suggests the reinsertion of rationalists and humanists into the mainstream of Islamic thought such that indigenous and authentic liberatory

forces could address the country's democratic and development needs.

Shireen M. Mazari in ' Militarism and the Militarization of Pakistan's Civil Society: 1977-1990' focuses on the impact of the martial law instituted in the regime of General Zia, the consequent militarization of Pakistani society and the resurgence of Pakistan's military which was especially pronounced after the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. The overflow of arms and drugs resulting from the Afghan war further compounded the ethnic, sectarian and king-ship cleavages in society.

The final article on Pakistan relates to the gender gap in Pakistani politics, particularly in Sindh. The role of women in political and ethnic causes and the participation of women in the Sindhi nationalist movement are dealt with in the article, 'The Gender Dimension in Sindhi's Ethnic Conflict' by Khawar Mumtaz. By providing historical information and other details about the Sindhi nationalist groups the author pleads for bridging the gender gap. She observes that the participation and involvement of women in the national movement has been mostly determined by the male leadership. In sum, this paper mainly focuses on the repressive measures depriving women of what were seen as their established rights and their support to the ethnic-national cause.

The book presents differing views regarding Indian society, the state and women. Dev Nathan in his paper, 'India: From Civilization to Nations', argues in favour of a Marxist proposition ensuring the right to secession for the minorities within India, while advocating a more democratic society. Sumanta Banerjee traces internal violence, secessionism, terrorism, insurgency, electoral violence and Hindu-Muslim conflicts to the inequitable distribution of wealth and regional imbalance. In his article, 'The Politics of Violence in the Indian State and Society', Banerjee argues that nationalist terrorist groups are seeking to establish autocratic theocracies in some states, especially J&K and Punjab and have been targeting state authorities, left leaders and religious moderates. The author rightly points out: 'The language of the gun is thus becoming a decisive force in political discourse in India in states like Kashmir.' The assassination of Indira Gandhi and the subsequent massacre of Sikhs in New Delhi, the killing of Rajiv Gandhi and other such incidents highlight the general culture of violence that marks Indian society today.

Another factor fanning the flames of communal violence is the criminalisation of politics. According

to Banerjee, two options are left for Indian society – disintegration or dialogue, accommodation and the evolution of a new model for society. He advocates the controversial proposal made in 1973 by the Sikh Shiromani Akali Dal about the restructuring of the Indian state, confining the central government's responsibility to defence, currency, foreign relations and communications.

The Hindu right wing groups – the RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party – are targeted by Tanika Sarkar in her paper, 'Hindu Women: Politicisation Through Communalism' which describes the mobilization of women with a conservative background. These groupings advocate empowerment of women through a learning of martial arts, ostensibly aimed as self-defence and to counter the violence of dowry murders and physical harassment by husbands, but simultaneously primes them for a war against Muslims. This training prepares Hindu women for citizenship in an authoritarian Hindu state.

Meghana Guhathakurta's paper, 'Democratization in Bangladesh: The Mass Uprising of 1990 and its Aftermath', focuses on the transfer of political power from the military to elected parliamentarians and its impact on Bangladesh society. She observes that a combination of political and student unrest, a decelerating economy, the conditionalities imposed by international aid donors following the disintegration of the Soviet Union were the reasons for the downfall of President Ershad and the transfer of power to a caretaker government.

The paper on Sri Lanka's internal conflict, 'Militarization, Violent State, Violent Society: Sri Lanka' by Jayadeva Uyangoda delineates the conflicts between the state and the LTTE and the resultant violence due to the excessive operations of legislature, executive and judiciary of the state. Apart from the state's operations, 'informal' agencies too created violence through different *modus operandi*. He highlights the mutual reinforcement between violence and ethnic essentialism. Given the vicious cycle of violence and ethnicity, the author is pessimistic about the possibility of a democratic solution.

The article, 'Ethnic Conflict: Rethinking the Fundamentals' by Kumar David argues that ethnicity lies at the core of many of the internal conflicts in India and elsewhere. He points out that larger national units enjoy an edge over smaller countries in organising their resources to achieve better economic production. Smaller units find it difficult to attain the full development of human potential. The author suggests a two-

pronged approach to handle the negative aspects of ethno-politics: a commitment to oppose racial and religious oppressions as well as oppressive regimes and social orders, and a commitment to a new world order and a new universal human consciousness.

Kumar Rupesinghe's essay on 'Strategies for Conflict Resolution: The Case of South Asia' looks at the entire region and offers possible options for resolving conflicts. After carefully scrutinizing the powers of state, sovereignty and the nature of conflicts – interstate, authority, ideological, identity and resource-based – the author presents some suggestions to mitigate the internal conflicts of the region. A greater degree of autonomy for minorities, fundamental social reforms and the establishment of political and constitutional democracy are some broad suggestions.

Rupesinghe opines that a rationalist formula may not always work out in all phases of conflicts. In support he points to the potential of the Sangha as a mediator of anti-Tamil violence. The experience of peace groups in the Philippines and their role in 'zones of peace'; peasant groups in Columbia and their methods of dialogue with guerrillas and government forces are highlighted as possible strategies. Convinced by the preventive and peace maintaining experience of the European Union and the evolving capacity of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for dispute resolution, the author suggests that South Asia borrow elements of the above strategy.

Overall, the book provides a summary account of internal conflicts created by government, military, militants and political functionaries in the societies of South Asian countries. The editors' introduction which weaves the major strands of all the articles, adds to the merit of the book. It provides a compact yet comprehensive account of the multi-faceted internal conflicts of the region.

The contributors to this volume argue forcefully in favour of a violence-free and tension-free society. However, Kumar Rupesinghe's suggestion to borrow strategies from Europe to resolve the internal problems of South Asia may not be suitable in the regional context of SAARC. Likewise, Sumanta Banerjee's recommendation to revisit the controversial 1973 proposal made by the Sikh Shiromani Akali Dal to restructure the Indian state is questionable, as it could lead to the fragmentation of Indian society and polity. Often, the discussions are repetitive, perhaps due to the similar problems faced by all countries. Had the papers either been arranged thematically or country-wise, it would have added to clarity. Nevertheless, the book deserves

attention as an important contribution towards understanding the problem.

**T. Nirmala Devi**

**INDIA'S NUCLEAR DETERRENT: Pokhran II and Beyond** edited by Amitabh Mattoo. Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

THERE is a problem with 'instant books' on a subject making headlines. Its immediacy makes for saleability but erodes its shelf life. But the editor of India's Nuclear Deterrent, Amitabh Mattoo, felt that it was necessary to urgently call in academic contributions on the implications of a nuclear India. 'India's nuclear policy was too important to be left to the judgement of civil servants and politicians,' he writes.

But do the essays in the book, written by some of the better known experts on the country's nuclear discourse, go beyond a sophisticated restructuring of today's journalistic comments? Do they provide a more enduring and prescient framework for an in-depth analysis for tomorrow as well as today? Mattoo's objective in the study is to interrogate 'five essentials'. (i) Was the decision to test and weaponise taken by a weak government out of tune with public opinion? (ii) Does China really pose a strategic challenge to India? (iii) Is deterrence stable in South Asia? (iv) Will US economic sanctions have an impact on India's nuclear policy? (v) Can India still play a meaningful role in the movement for nuclear disarmament?

Somewhere in between the impressive modelling of force structures of an Indian nuclear deterrent in these essays, gets misplaced the basic question: Do nuclear weapons enhance the security of the Indian people? The public opinion surveys marshalled by Mattoo (and imaginatively juxtaposed with the surveys done after the 1974 explosion) relate the nuclear issue with national self-esteem and international status which cuts across partisan lines. At the popular level, the emphasis is less on strategic ramifications than on scientific achievement. But for most strategists the one credible *raison atomique* is China, compounded by the Pak-China entente and the US ambivalence towards CIA intelligence on China's transfer of technology to Pakistan. Mattoo laments that even after the finger wagging at China in the context of the tests there has been no meaningful debate on the China threat. This, he argues, is largely because of a lack of Indian expertise on China.

This lack of expertise is reflected in the noticeable absence of references to Indian scholarship or

Indian intelligence sources in the construction of the Chinese threat. Two contradictory 'foreign' assessments of China are set out – one the liberal institutionalist, which privileges accommodative to offensive strategies and the other, a 'realist' reading of Chinese culture which stresses offensive coercive strategies. The realist view holds sway. But Vġai K. Nair's analysis of the China threat in the 'The Structure of Indian Deterrent' is a tired recitation of the Ministry of Defence's annual report without full stops and quotation marks. George Fernandes' assertions about the Chinese threat are laid out but not examined. Instead there are throw away assertions like: 'The stonewalling tactics being employed by the Chinese indicate that they have no desire to resolve the Sino-Indian territorial dispute' or, 'This is clearly illustrated by the number of planned incursions along the LAC in 1997,' demonstrating the use of political carrot to maintain and consolidate the *status quo* 'and its military stick to remind the Indian political leadership that the territorial dispute remains unresolved.'

Kanti Bajpai, turning over the same facts, favours the liberal interpretation. India, he claims, does not figure in China's threat cosmology. China is a 'satisfied power' and the status quo on the border favours China. Its claims on Sikkim and Arunachal are of tactical use. Bajpai notes that the 1980s crisis over Sumdorong Chu and Operation Chequerboard were not allowed to disrupt the dialogue, thus demonstrating the importance both attach to normalisation. He might have also mentioned China discontinuing its support for separatist insurgents in the North East.

Disappointingly, the analysis of the China *raison atomique* does not go beyond picking up the popularly accepted assumptions in the polarised discourse on China. Nair admits that the Indian leadership needs to analyse what Chinese interest is facilitated by their assistance to Pakistan. It is a pity that none of these essays attempts a serious or imaginative interrogation of the China threat.

Where the essays creatively break new ground is in the modelling of strategic deterrent structures for India. Evidently, the forte of the contributors chosen is strategic studies, with only subsidiary foreign policy concerns. Picking up one end of India's nuclear policy spectrum, that is a 'maximalist deterrent', is Bharat Karnad's combative essay, 'A Thermuclear Deterrent'. Karnad seeks to counter the drift towards an unexamined 'minimum deterrence' outline becoming state policy by default. At the other end is Kanti Bajpai's persuasive 'The Fallacy of a Nuclear

Deterrent' which challenges pervading nuclear fatalism and puts back on the agenda the nuclear 'renunciation option' driven not by 'moral objections' but because there are other security pathways which eschew nuclear weapons.

Karnad sets his sights on a nuclear deterrent which will achieve for India 'strategic independence'. Rejecting estimates of a minimal deterrence structure of 60 odd nuclear weapons as suggested by K. Subrahmanyam, Karnad models a full and robust nuclear deterrence structure of 300 plus, as fitting of a middle power. Its cost would be around Rs 60,000 crores, affordable at 1/42 of today's GNP. Thermonuclear weapons would ensure for the first time 'absolute security'. A multi-megaton thermonuclear weapon is not much more expensive to produce than a fission weapon. A small arsenal of nuclear weapons based on low accuracy missiles with a high CEP will not make for a credible Indian nuclear deterrent. Drawing upon the international *gurus* of the nuclear deterrence discourse, Karnad argues for a maximalist deterrence structure since deterrence, ultimately, is a mind game played in peace time to compel obedience and not to exert influence in a military conflict. Consequently there is to be no signing of CTBT or FMCT till the capacity to build 1000 weapons warheads is reached. And in the end, Karnad argues, it is the momentum of high technology research which propels nuclear testing and weaponisation programmes.

Karnad delinks the probable structure of an Indian nuclear deterrent from a specific threat, especially from a nuclear Pakistan. India's strategic and threat compass includes many other sources of insecurity. Quoting the Indian government's assertion about nuclear weapons as a strategic (out of the area) deterrent, he rules out the use of nuclear weapons in the Indo Pakistan theatre. 'In the South Asian context, the use of nuclear weapons is tactical use which the Indian government has wisely forsworn,' i.e., no first use. Karnad dismisses the western propensity to draw up nuclear conflagration scenarios in South Asia and argues that the same restraint that India and Pakistan have shown in their conventional wars is likely to be paralleled in their responsible handling of nuclear weapons. As a firebreak he suggests that there should be no nuclear arming of the Prithvi missile.

In contrast Nair constructs a Pakistan specific, an almost 'tactical' nuclear deterrent structure targeting counter value and counter force targets. No mention is made of the probability of a fallout on neighbouring India. Weapons capability *vis-à-vis* Pakistan is to

destroy it as a socio-economic entity and vis-à-vis China is to generate dangerous imbalances between that country and her primary adversaries – USA? A recommended force structure is an aggregate of 132 weapons of different types deployed on SSBNs and IRBMs.

Kanti Bajpai draws up an audit on India having a survivable second strike and concludes that in the near and medium term there are numerous gaps which cannot be overcome. That is, it does not have the ability to reply to a large first strike by China. Even if India was able to put in place a credible retaliatory deterrent, Bajpai argues that military stability – zero possibility of attack – would not be assured. This was demonstrated in the chilling ‘near misses’ of a nuclear confrontation between the US and the USSR. Bajpai picks up the various moments in history where deterrence has failed to prevent a conventional conflict breaking out between asymmetric nuclear forces (China-USSR) or conventional and nuclear (Vietnam and China). Moreover nuclear weapons may positively encourage conflict below nuclear and all-out conventional war threshold, e.g. Pakistan’s support for insurgency in Kashmir. Much of it, though, is ground covered by Bajpai in earlier writings.

Analysing how deterrence in South Asia could fail, Bajpai examines how the classic security dilemma, i.e., the inability to distinguish between strategic offence and defence is the kind of dynamic which was in evidence in Operation Brasstacks-Zarb-e Momin crisis. More recently, is the example of Pakistan raising the alarm that India is threatening a first strike in May 1998. In all these ‘crises’, Pakistan raised the spectre of nuclear weapons largely to internationalise the issue. However, as Bajpai presciently warns, ‘Pakistan’s flair for the dangerous reveals a deep seated fear about the larger neighbour and that this psychological state could lead it into potentially catastrophic decisions.’

As in any collection of essays, the quality varies. But R. Ramachandran’s analysis of the scientific dimension carries the authority of his long standing study of the subject when he asserts that ‘data from five tests would seem to be of limited value to design a battery of highly sophisticated weapons. But these should suffice for weaponisation based on a few basic designs and to maintain the professed minimum deterrent.’

Mattoo’s collection of essays is likely to be highly sought after as a ‘ready reckoner’. It makes accessible in one place all you wanted to know about possible nuclear deterrent structures, the scientific dimension, impact of sanctions and the technology export control

regime. It will make for a more informed debate on an Indian nuclear deterrent.

Rita Manchanda

**WHAT CONSTITUTES NATIONAL SECURITY IN A CHANGING WORLD ORDER? India’s Strategic Thought** by Jaswant Singh. CASI Occasional Paper No. 6, 1998.

**ACROSS BORDERS: Fifty Years of India’s Foreign Policy** by J.N. Dixit. Picus Books, New Delhi, 1998.

**INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY, 1947-92: Shadow and Substance** by Harish Kapur. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1994.

**ETHNICITY, SECURITY, AND SEPARATISM IN INDIA** by Maya Chadda. Columbia University Press, New York, 1993.

HOW has India done in the world? How has it handled its relations with other countries? Fifty years after Independence and nearly a decade after the end of the Cold War seems a good time to reflect on Indian foreign policy. The four authors under review – one a serving politician, an ex-diplomat and two NRI academics – obviously thought so as well.

What are the main elements of Indian foreign policy? Is there a pattern? Over fifty years, how has this policy performed? Can one say, on balance, that free India’s policies towards other countries have been a success? Jaswant Singh, J.N. Dixit, Harish Kapur and Maya Chadda offer varying opinions on these basic questions. The conventional view today is that Indian foreign policy has been more or less a failure, that the Nehruvian policy has ill-served India. And it has failed because it was woolly headed and idealistic and shunned strategic thinking and power politics. Is this correct?

A crude answer emerges from reading these four recent assessments. Perhaps not surprisingly, Jaswant Singh of the BJP is of the ‘India has failed’ school. Dixit, by contrast, thinks that Indian foreign policy on balance has been successful. Harish Kapur and Maya Chadda stand somewhere in between Jaswant Singh and Dixit. Kapur is almost agnostic in his assessment, but overall the reader is left with the impression that, while India had done alright in its foreign relations, there has been a decline in the country’s international involvement and in the extent to which it is able to shape

international events. Chadda thinks India was most successful in managing a regional policy during the early years, with Nehru at the helm, but with growing centralization of decision-making since Nehru and increasing doubts about the impartiality of the central government in dealing with ethnic claims, Indian policy has become more problematic.

Jaswant Singh's monograph on India's strategic thought is interesting for at least three reasons: first, the author is a senior politician with the ruling BJP; second, he is responsible for the ongoing India-US dialogue after Pokhran II, and his thoughts on the subject of strategy may well be affecting this vital realm of foreign policy; and third, he takes a broad and thematic view of India's relations with the outside world. A key conclusion of the monograph is that India's way of dealing with others has been a failure, historically and over the past fifty years or so.

Jaswant Singh argues a familiar case, namely, that India's failure to deal with others advantageously comes from its lack of strategic thinking. Singh's monograph attempts to do several things, but most interestingly it tries to show why India lacks a strategic tradition. According to him, a series of 'absences' are responsible for India's parlous condition: Indian civilization is non-proselytizing; India has never had a 'functional' and 'assertive' state; its sense of nationhood is 'episodic' and 'incidental'; the country has never known anything but military reverses and 'servitude'; its people do not have a written history; the 'fixity' of India's historical imagination does not let it see the past as a living inspiration; there is confusion about national identity; Gandhian pacifism has befuddled Indian society; the 'moral tones' of non-alignment have made strategic thought irrelevant; Indians do not have the right 'character, attitude, and approach' to war; they have failed to develop the idea that territory had to be defended at all costs; they have suffered under the delusion that foreigners would fight in the same way they did; honour, chivalry, or absence of ruthlessness did not allow Indians to finish off their opponents (rather like the Indian cricket team!); and Indians have cultivated a 'habitual disinterest' in the broader issues relating to national security.

This is quite an indictment, coming as it does from a leader of a party which wants us to be proud about India, about being Indian (*garve se kaho*), and about buying Indian (*swadeshi*)! If this is the Hindutva view of India, there is not much to be proud of. Is India as bad as Jaswant Singh would have us believe? Is our history replete with such colossal failures?

Clearly J.N. Dixit, India's foreign secretary until 1993, does not think so. Across Borders is his latest book. It is redolent of his seminar interventions and his previous writings, touching on themes, ideas, predilections, prescriptions, incidents, and periods that one associates with this most public of former foreign secretaries. However, this is not a repackaging of his earlier books which touched on his ambassadorial term in Sri Lanka and on relations with Pakistan. It is a descriptive and analytical survey of Indian foreign policy since Independence, and therefore sits somewhere between a superior if fact-ridden textbook and a more rigorous, critical weighing of the formulation, direction, successes and failures of India's relations with the world.

Dixit argues that, on balance, India's foreign policy has been a success. The basically Nehruvian principles and vision that have undergirded, with some inflections and adaptations, our relations with the rest of the world have advanced our interests, kept the peace more or less, and made us some enduring friends. In this day and age of Nehru-bashing, this is not a particularly fashionable conclusion. Perhaps Dixit's assessment arises from the conceit of an insider, someone whose professional life was dedicated to the prosecution of a basically Nehruvian policy. But I think we must grant that Dixit is far too self-conscious and honest to be caught in the trap of self-delusion and self-congratulation.

A second and related conclusion is Dixit's rating of his political bosses: in other words, who was a successful practitioner of the art of diplomacy and who was not? Not one to mince words, Dixit rates the Nehru family and Lal Bahadur Shastri high. P.V. Narasimha Rao, as both foreign minister and prime minister gets a good credit rating. Chandra Shekhar in his brief sojourn as prime minister gets a tick mark or two of approval. Atal Behari Vajpayee as foreign minister in 1977-79 also merits Dixit's approval. But V.P. Singh and I.K. Gujral do badly in Dixit's estimation: they failed to come to grips with the end of the Soviet Union; V.P. Singh mishandled Kashmir (particularly the Rubaiya Sayeed kidnapping) and Sri Lanka; and Gujral got nowhere with the 'Gujral Doctrine'. This would be mere gossip, in a sense, except that, as Dixit points out, Singh and Gujral led, or rather misled, Indian foreign policy at a transformative moment.

Dixit is not uncritical of the Indian record. Interestingly, India's China policy comes in for some stick. Thus, he suggests that India should go beyond a 'historical, emotional, and purely technical' approach to



the border problem; it should compromise, with an eye to the strategic interests of both sides; it should accept that colonial boundary delineations are not binding and that compromise plus new cartographic and legal methods of resolving the dispute exist; it should also continue with the CBM approach initiated in the 1990s; and finally, it should educate public opinion on the need for, and nature of, a final settlement.

Dixit is also refreshingly blunt on India's handling of what he describes as two 'poignant' issues which had a negative impact on its foreign relations: Babri Masjid and Kashmir. He accuses the government of the day of mishandling the Babri issue. Dixit reveals that he urged the Cabinet Secretary, S. Rajagopal, 'to move... security forces to the actual site [of the mosque] to prevent any untoward developments.' Rajagopal for 'reasons best known to him, hesitated from conveying this categorical advice' (p. 230). He is even more critical on Kashmir. The government's Kashmir policy was 'tragedy bordering on farce' (p. 231). Institutional incoherence, personal rivalries, bad governance, lack of consensus among parties and the public – all these have contributed to the disaster. Force has its limits; India must acknowledge its mishandling of Kashmiri alienation if it is to restore peace and tranquillity to this troubled state – not new admittedly, but boldly said for a former official.

Harish Kapur's *India's Foreign Policy* is, like Dixit's book, a survey. Kapur's conclusion is that India has over fifty years striven to achieve four goals in which foreign policy has played a vital role: national security, economic modernization, regional hegemony, and international prestige and involvement. Personalities count, and so India's leaders have dealt with these issues in different ways and with varying degrees of success. In a judgement that is rather close to Dixit's, Kapur rates Nehru, Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and Rao as the best in dealing with India's external challenges. Desai, Charan Singh, V.P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar did less well, in part because they paid international issues much less attention.

On balance, Kapur seems to suggest that India has done well enough in terms of its foreign policy. New Delhi has 'adapted' to changing realities in the four areas. That said, there are serious challenges ahead. National security increasingly involves attention to domestic troubles, a point that is made by all four writers. In addition, South Asia is beset by turbulence. Nearby regions too are unstable. China is a growing threat by virtue of its growing power. The loss of the Soviet Union as a bulwark and ally has made India more

vulnerable internationally. In respect of modernization, India has to come to terms with globalization. Globalization is an opportunity and India must take advantage of it. But its domestic and international consequences will be far reaching for India. India's desire for regional hegemony has been stymied. It has not been recognized as the leader of South Asia by its regional neighbours or by powerful outsiders. If India wants to attain greater influence in the region, it must pursue a strategy of accommodation and cooperation. Finally, India's internationalist role has been diminishing steadily since the heady days of Nehru and is now firmly regionalist rather than globalist. India's global role is basically limited by regional and domestic instabilities and preoccupations. Kapur concludes with the judgement that Indian foreign policy is marked more and more by reactivity rather than 'voluntarism', and it is ever more sensitive to domestic factors.

Maya Chadda's *Ethnicity, Security and Separatism in India* focuses on India's regional policy and the domestic roots of its policy. She notes that one view of India is that it is basically a hegemonic-minded power in South Asia. A contrary view is that India is basically a defensive, *status quo* power in respect of the region. Chadda argues that neither view is correct. A third and more accurate view comes from looking at the overlap between domestic and regional policy. Nation building and international relations must be seen in one framework because that is in effect how decision makers in developing countries have to deal with social reality. In particular, ethnic fragmentation and the stresses and strains arising from it in post-colonial societies spill over into neighbouring countries.

South Asia is no exception. India is beset by its own ethnic troubles and is simultaneously at the centre of ethnic spillovers from its neighbours. And the pressures that result have led India to adopt a regional policy which is neither hegemonic or defensive. It is a policy, instead, which is sophisticated and managerial for the most part and relies on 'relational control' and 'interlocking balances'. Relational control is the ability to affect not only outcomes but relations of convergence and conflict which produce outcomes. Relational control allows for interlocking balances of interests between centralising state authority and sub-nationalities. It also allows policy-makers to fashion an external balance, to adjust relations with neighbours who may be tempted to interfere in India's domestic ethnic conflicts. Relational control involves the use of persuasion, coercion, sanctions and force to produce an internal and external balance.

Two kinds of interlocking balances have been at the core of India's regional policy. The first balance is between idea of the historic state of India which is imagined as united and coherent and the idea of the modern state of India which is imagined as pluralistic but under a universalistic and rational central authority that, essentially, allows differences to be accommodated. Policy-makers have to reconcile these two, often contending visions of India. The second balance requires 'accommodation of conflicting claims to legislative power, public offices, and popular votes', what Chadda calls the 'traditional stuff of politics'. It is in this realm that interlocking balance is actually exercised through acts of 'representation and co-optation, coercion or persuasion.' To the extent that New Delhi fears that these balances are unravelling and that outsiders can take advantage of it, Indian policy-makers are forced to cultivate power and influence over the neighbourhood. This is mistaken as hegemonism.

What conclusions can one draw about Indian foreign policy based on these four works? First, India's policies have been sophisticated and successful, in the main. Obviously, Jaswant Singh differs here. Second, India's early leaders were rather more interested in and adept at foreign policy. This should give us a pause for thought in an era of globalization where India is willy-nilly forced to engage the larger world: we seem to be drawing in at the precise moment when we should be reaching outwards. Third, domestic politics have and will continue to profoundly affect the course of our policies and our ability to deal with outsiders consistently and effectively. Fourth, India faces a variety of challenges to its unity and safety in the years to come. The end of the Cold War may be a comfort to the western powers, but in regions such as South Asia there are dangers ahead. Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, Indian foreign policy is distinctly liberal. By liberal, I mean simply that it repeatedly turns away from an excessively power politics approach. If there is one common assessment and concern among the four authors it is that India cannot and should not run its foreign relations with a narrow focus on Indian interests backed by coercive power. Chadda is the least prescriptive of the four but given what she says about the nature of and need for internal accommodation in India, I think it is fair to suppose that she would support a broadly liberal policy in the external realm as well.

**Kanti Bajpai**

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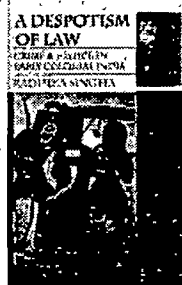
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# Comment:

## I want to be the last child

ON 6 August 1945 an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and thus opened a Pandora's box. Even as the horrible era of World War II was coming to an end, another horrible era of nuclear war had begun. Governments have invested enormous resources in the development of compact and effective nuclear weapons for a holocaust, so that their country can be one of the nuclear powers of the world.

A nuclear deterrent makes a country sceptical. The logic of using a nuclear weapon may be gaining ground as large amounts of money have been used to develop it. I don't see any future for human beings as long as we continue to possess nuclear weapons. We are currently living under a threat of nuclear weapons which have the capacity to completely annihilate every form of life, including human beings, from this planet.

'On the day', I, a 14 years old girl, saw a burning hell. The Bomb created a great shock, as if the sun in the sky had dropped on the earth, burning people as if they were flammable rags. Hiroshima, a city of 400,000 people, suddenly turned into a city of death. I can never forget the scenes of 53 years ago, such as the high flames throughout the night, people who all looked like ghosts roaming the streets, the numberless dead bodies, blue smoke from cremation fires and so on. All these scenes make me shudder even today.

Till then I had firmly believed that the war was a crusade to bring about liberation and peace in Asia. On that day, I realized that the war meant nothing but killing people. In the ruins of the town, I clasped many dead bodies telling them: 'You must be suffering with the heat. I too was supposed to die, but I am alive.' Hiroshima is now completely rebuilt but the victims' bones and blood still remain deep in the soil of the streets.

My belief that 'I was supposed to die' is gaining strength with every passing year. The reason is that on that day I was to go to the Shim hospital with my mother to hospitalize my elder brother. The epicentre was just 580 meters from the hospital. The ground temperature

at the time of the bomb blast reached 6000 degrees celsius. Because of the heat, the blast, and the radioactivity, a person vanished instantly, not leaving behind even a piece of bone. My elder brother who was standing at the verandah of our house located 1200 metre away from the epicentre died as a result of the heat. His face and neck turned black like lava from a volcano.

Another tragedy of the nuclear bomb was caused by the remaining radioactivity. It severely damaged the internal organs, blood and bones and killed tens of thousands. Even today, a number of people including some in the second generation are still suffering. The existence of chemical weapons, the effects of various chemicals, and the destruction of the environment are similarly dangerous for human minds and bodies.

I came to know a shocking fact from a newspaper on 29 June that after the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, the focus would now be on the 4th generation weapons; a H-bomb with a laser. This means that a country can possess a nuclear weapon without conducting a nuclear test. What a dreadful situation!

Scientists are largely responsible for this situation which endangers all human beings. We should not be mere robots who work for the sake of our own country, but a human who is proud to serve for the benefit of all human beings on the planet. Politicians and military leaders have an important obligation to know what exactly happened in Hiroshima, not from the 30,000 feet height from where the A-bomb was dropped, but on the ground where 200,000 people died, and convey the reality to their people.

I sincerely hope children of the 21st century will grow up in a world without nuclear weapons, war and fear of starvation. Let us join together to realize this. Let the children, like me from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, be the last ones who experienced an A-bomb.

**Fumiko Amano**  
Japan

# Communication

WE would like to respond to the review of our book, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: from Iyothoe Thass to Periyar*, which appeared in *Seminar* 471, November 1998.

1) We have written a 556 page book. Its contents narrate a little-known history of modern Tamil society. Here are essays on brahmin subjectivity, the advent and decline of a certain sort of political non-brahminism, the assertion of dalit history and identity, the coming of the radical self-respect movement and the evolution of a distinctive Dravidian, non-caste political constituency. But Shastri Ramachandaran's review of our book has nothing to say about any of these themes. The reviewer appears disinterested in what we are actually saying in the book, as well as determined to impose his own largely distorted reading on the evidence we present. In this sense, the review reflects the reviewer's own prejudices than anything else.

We would have welcomed a robust, imaginative and critical review of our book which, unlike this one, is able to distinguish the passion we have for our subject from routine prejudice, and which is able to locate and suggest ways and means of overcoming the limits to our argument. But a review such as this, which ignores the book's contents and mulls over its own pet paranoias, does not serve its purpose or ours.

2) The book presents to the non-Tamil reader two great and unusual men and thinkers, Iyothoe Thass and Periyar. Both men were critical of brahmins and brahminism, but even more so of the varnashrama dharmic social order that systematically disvalues manual labour and labourers on one hand, and reifies the power of an intellect separated from life, work and lived social relationships, on the other. Nowhere in this review do we get a glimpse of the intricacy of argument and the passionate logic with which both men expounded their ideas. Instead we have a routine invocation of the most banal sorts of

objections to non-brahminism: that it was pitted against a mere 3% of the population; that its agents were facile in their historical reasoning; that, in fact the entire business of Aryan and Dravidian, and invaders and indigenes is a foolish bit of polemic; that non-brahmin leaders and ideologues worked overtime to perpetuate colonial rule; and that Periyar was a crude brahmin hater who hastened his followers to prefer snakes to brahmins.

None of these objections have any basis in fact, logic or sound argument. Brahmins may be a minority in Tamil country, but hegemony works everywhere through the power of expressive and highly persuasive ideologies and not through the power of numbers. In our very first chapter we have attempted to explain how this happened in Madras at the beginning of our century. Why has not Ramachandaran made a single reference to our complex description of brahmin subjectivity? Or to the fact that we have made brahmins speak in their own voice and allowed the reader to judge the limits to their avowed liberalism?

As for faulty historical logic, the references in our book to 'Aryan invaders' and 'foreign interlopers', as well as to the purported egalitarianism of old Tamil society – these have been duly historicised and contextualised. We have demonstrated how history was actually a favourite discursive game with intellectuals at the beginning of our century and that non-brahmins responded in a distinctive fashion to the challenges posed by colonial knowledge systems such as numismatics, philology and ethnology. The reviewer has made it seem as if the Aryan-Dravidian controversy was a foolish one and that those who indulged in it were misguided antiquarians who merely wanted to fault the Tamil brahmin.

Worse, he has conflated particular opinions, as expressed by particular actors and agents at a given

conjuncture, with what he assumes to be our views. This is truly mischievous, since it completely misrepresents our authorial reticence and makes us seem partisan. We have, as we note in our introduction, returned to non-brahmins and dalits a history that historians have denied them and returned to that history voices which have so far been unrecorded. We have not trespassed the limits of our enquiry, and have merely lived up to the passion which sent us on this historical quest in the first place.

The non-brahmin support for British rule is also wilfully misinterpreted. A careful reader of the text, especially of chapters 2-6, will note that non-brahmins preferred British rule to brahmin rule chiefly because they were unwilling to accept that Indian nationalism was truly consensual and were quite convinced that it was a fiction which served the interests of the Indian upper castes. The reviewer does not care to trace in all its complexity, the non-brahmin-British relationship as we have outlined it, and is instead content to fall back on unexamined assumptions that tautologically assert their truth value. As for Periyar, since this is one thinker who has proved notoriously difficult to domesticate, those who find his ideas bothersome, threatening and challenging attempt to get out of their unease by blaming him instead. Ramachandaran has resorted to this mode of criticism as well and rather than engage with a brilliant, fierce and prophetic mind has taken to ridiculing it.

Our book contains many instances of the great man's insights regarding the nature of power and the modes of its deployment in caste society and if these have not caught the reviewer's attention, one can only lament his loss.

Though one is loath to discuss authorial intent and motivation, Ramachandaran's self-righteous and cynical tone begs the question: why is it that whenever brahmin power and authority are criticised, those who feel such criticisms to be misplaced slide away from the terms of the argument and conveniently speak of the will to power of a generic and unspecified ruling class? Why this culture of silence, of non-accountability, this foreclosing of self-criticism?

Finally, it really bothers us that *Seminar*, in its issue on dalits, should carry such a review as this. Not only is it unfair to the book's subject but to the readers of the journal as well, for rarely does such an ill-informed and self-important article appear in it.

**V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai**

## A note from seminar

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# Backpage

IT is often argued that election season is the best time to raise issues of general concern. After all, when else do ordinary citizens encounter the political class as captive audience, even more as supplicants. It is thus not surprising that so many of our activist groups rev up their special concerns hoping to inveigle them into the political agendas of contending parties. From onions to saraswati vandana – every conceivable issue is currently battling for political recognition.

In these hustings, where each contestant tirelessly proclaims his/her empathy for the poor, it is indeed intriguing that a recent cabinet decision to place the amended Land Acquisition Act (1894) in the winter session of Parliament has gone virtually unnoticed. No wonder the recent meeting of NGOs and action groups interrogating the draft legislation and proposing amendments never made it to our newspapers.

Rarely is it realized that barring Africa, India enjoys the dubious distinction of having generated the largest number of displaced people, a large majority in the name of development. The conservative estimate of the number of people displaced from 1950 to 1991 is about 2,13,00,000, if one restricts the causal factors to dams, mines, wildlife sanctuaries and industry. If one includes urban displacement due to various deliberate or planned activities, then the number would rise to 30-35 million. According to government records at least 75% of those displaced are still not cared for or rehabilitated.

Central to the process of displacement and (hopefully) rehabilitation is the Land Acquisition Act. This 1894 legislation laid down the purpose for, conditions under, and the procedure through which land could be notified for acquisition as also the compensation to be paid.

It is indeed instructive that, particularly after the shifts in economic policy favouring private enterprise, efforts are underway to modify the LAA with the intention to facilitate and speed-up the acquisition process. The current draft is a step in that direction. This when, despite nearly two decades of organising, networking and lobbying by concerned activist groups, the government has turned a deaf ear to pleas about a national rehabilitation policy.

The aforementioned NGO meeting points out that the evolution of the meaning of public purpose gives the state extremely broad powers of acquisition since it continues to be premised on the doctrine of eminent

domain. Simply stated, land which is not privately owned (all common property resources – forests, pastures, wasteland) is seen as vested in the state. Consequently, there is no legal recognition of the poor whose very livelihood depends on accessing these resources.

The proposed new definition of public interest not only goes beyond judicial scrutiny, but may be altered after acquisition and can only be determined by the state. Further, the thrust towards making the process swifter and less cumbersome has resulted in a drastic shortening of the legal notice period, as also the period in which objections can be filed. Finally, the district collector is sought to be installed as the final authority in the matter. Appeals, if any, can only be entertained by the High Court.

Notwithstanding the passage of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution relating to panchayats and municipalities, the proposed act is marked by its non-recognition of the locus-standi of even these statutory bodies, what to mention other collectivities and public interest groups. No right to information here! Similarly, when discussing compensation, the proposed act does not talk about replacement of livelihood lost or ensuring that life after resettlement is at the minimum equivalent to the state at the time of acquisition. Further, if our power minister is to be taken seriously, activists who delay acquisition proceedings should be jailed as anti-national for hampering our efforts to facilitate the inflow of private investment in infrastructure projects.

It should thus cause little surprise that affected groups and communities are dismayed with what they see as 'pro-industry' amendments. Unlike earlier when the state machinery was somewhat more pluralised and there was the possibility of relying on the state as a bulwark, the congruence of interest between the state and private industry is far more marked today.

If politics does serve a public-purpose then one has a right to assume that some of these concerns should be refracted through the political process. Or is it that those displaced or facing displacement, since they come from the bottom layers of society, often not even registered as voters, are in actual fact not citizens? As a nation prone to flaunt its status as the world's largest democracy, this is a question worth pondering over.

**Harsh Sethi**

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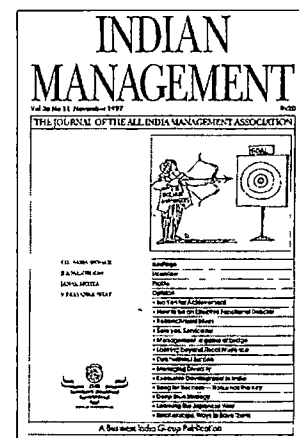
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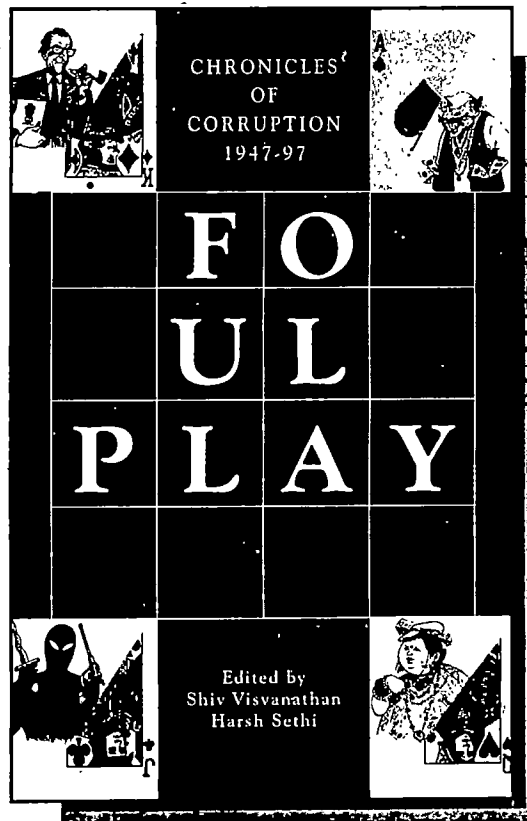
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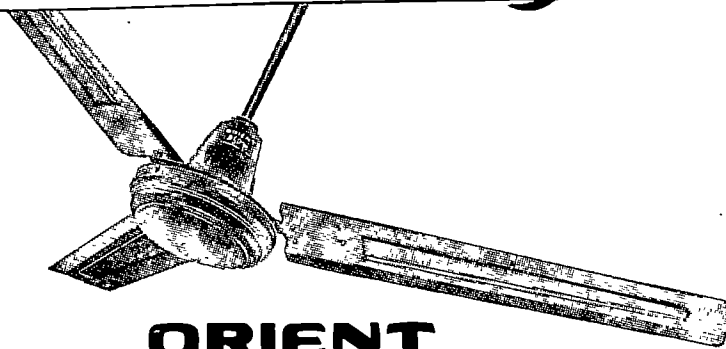
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